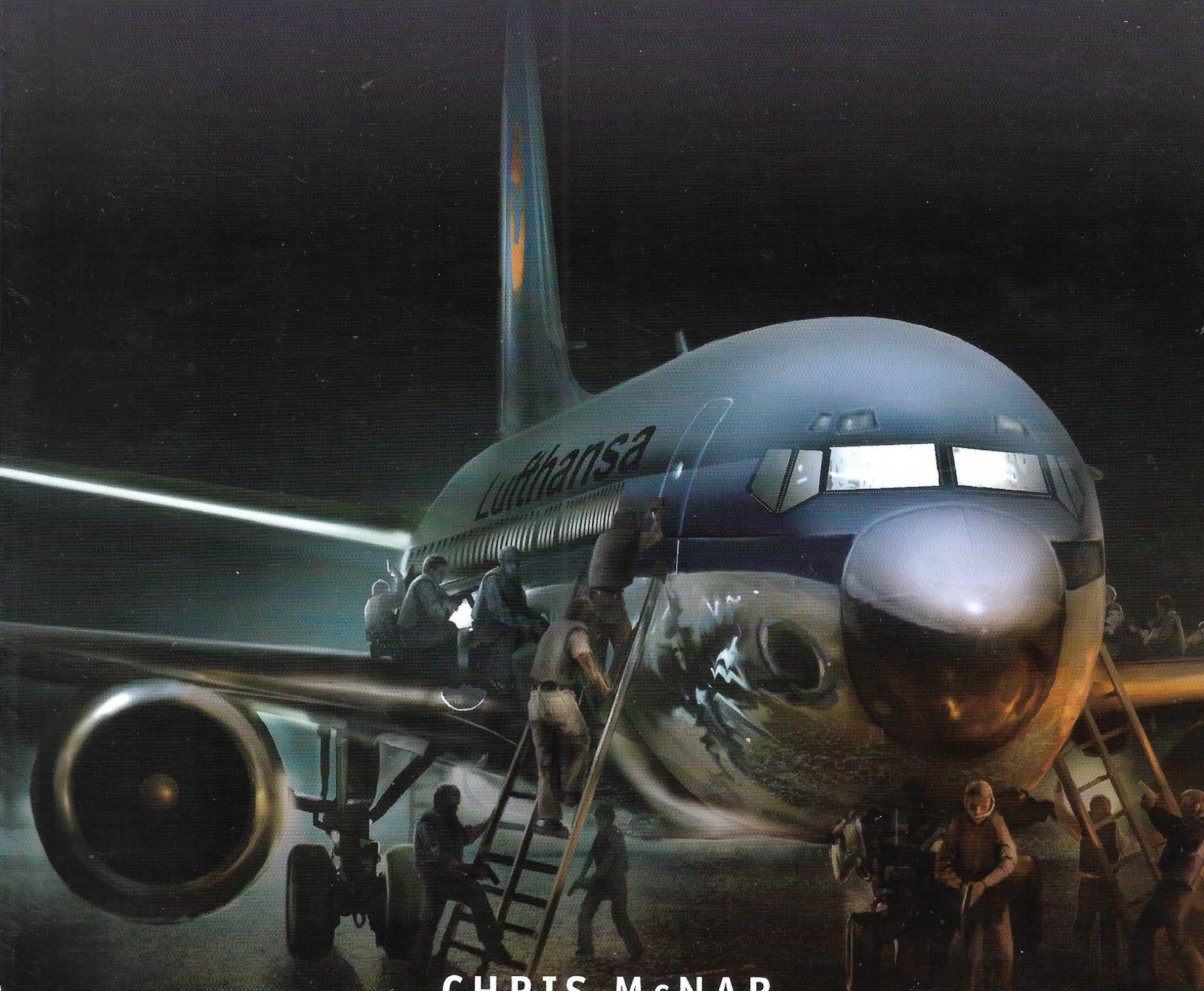
RAID

STORMING FLIGHT 181

GSG 9 and the Mogadishu Hijack 1977



CHRIS McNAB

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATORS

CHRIS McNAB is an author and editor. To date he has published over 25 books, including *Twentieth Century Small Arms* (2001), *Gunfighters – The Outlaws and their weapons* (2005, contributing editor), *The Personal Security Handbook* (2003), *The Encyclopedia of Combat Techniques* (2002) and *The Illustrated History of the Vietnam War* (2000). He is the co-author of *Tools of Violence* (2008) and has recently completed *Deadly Force* (2009), both for Osprey. Chris has also written extensively for major encyclopedia series, including *African-American Biographies* (2006), *USA 1950s* (2006) and *Reformation, Exploration and Empire* (2005), and has contributed to *The Times* on the war in Iraq.

HOWARD GERRARD studied at the Wallasey School of Art and has been a freelance designer and illustrator for over 20 years. He has worked for a number of publishers and is an associate member of the Guild of Aviation Artists. He has won both the Society of British Aerospace Companies Award and the Wilkinson Sword Trophy and has illustrated a number of books for Osprey including Campaign 69: *Nagashino 1575*, and Campaign 72: *Jutland 1916*. Howard lives and works in Kent.

Born in Malaya in 1949, **ALAN GILLILAND** studied photography/film and architecture, and has worked as a photojournalist and cartoonist. He also spent 18 years as the graphics editor of The Daily Telegraph, winning 19 awards in that time, including numerous UK Press Awards. He now writes, illustrates and publishes fiction (www.ravensquill.com), as well as illustrating for a variety of publishers (including Osprey, the Penguin Group, Brown Reference Group, Ivy Group and Aurum), architects and developers, such as John McAslan (Olympic Energy Centre) and Kit Martin (Prince Charles' Phoenix Trust advisor on historic buildings). www.alangilliland.com

MARIUSZ KOZIK was born in Lublin, Poland, in 1973. From 1989 to 1994 he studied fine art at the Artistic Lyceum in Lublin, then from 1995 to 2000 at the Academy Of Arts in Wroclaw, earning his diploma under Professor Joseph Halas. Mariusz's work has been exhibited extensively in Poland. While he loves traditional painting methods, he began experimenting with computer-assisted artwork in 2006. His enthusiasm for military history began as a boy but has blossomed with his career. Mariusz is completing all the cover artwork for the Osprey Raid series.

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Mogadishu Hijack 1977

CHRIS McNAB

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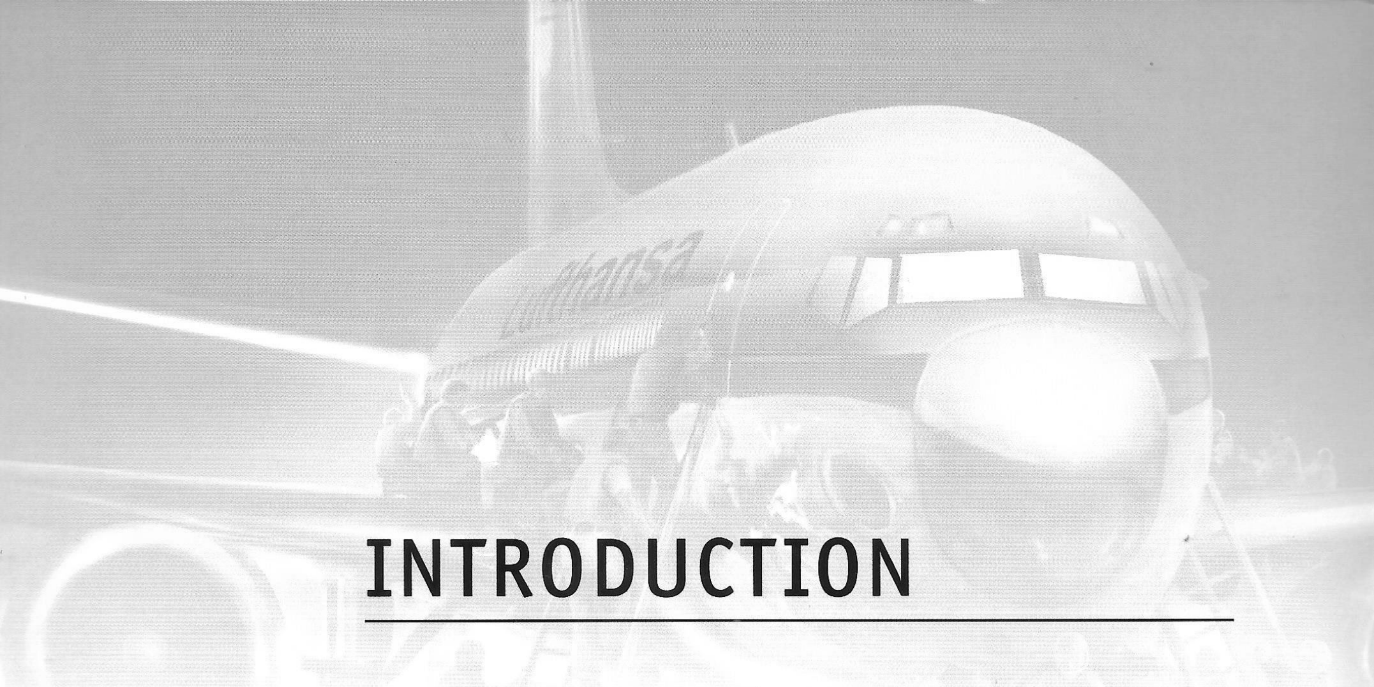


INTRODUCTION

Terrorism was one of the defining trends of the 1970s. Although unconventional warfare was nothing new, with antecedents reaching back to ancient history, during that decade terrorist activity reached levels of organization, influence and power never previously witnessed. According to a US National Security Agency report issued in 2003, the number of terrorist incidents nearly doubled in number from 1968 to 1970, and then grew by about 25 per cent each year for the first years of the decade.

Multiple influences fed into this surge in terrorism. Culturally, the 1970s were a decade infused with radicalism, as significant sections of the global youth population embraced largely left-wing or anarchist philosophies, and pitted themselves against what they saw as the conservative and reactionary establishment. Groups such as the Italian Red Brigades (one of nearly 100 terrorist groups that operated in 1970s Italy) and the German Rote Armee Fraktion (RAF; Red Army Faction), for example, rationalized a regular series of assassinations, kidnappings and bomb attacks through vaguely constructed ideas of revolution. One piece of Red Brigades literature stated that 'Urban guerrilla warfare plays a decisive role in the action of disarticulation of the regime and the state', the pseudo-academic language being typical packaging around terrorist actions.

Yet in addition to cultural influences behind terrorism, there were also genuine political and social issues fuelling the phenomenon. The process of decolonization following the end of World War II fuelled numerous anti-European/American independence movements, and militarized factions in countries left destabilized by independence. Revolutionary and insurgency wars therefore swept the globe, particularly in Africa, South-East Asia and Latin America, but European governments also struggled with organizations such as the Basque separatist Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) in Spain and the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in the United Kingdom. Such insurgencies were often given impetus by the wider context of the Cold War, different groups drawing on superpower sponsorship, or at least supplies through satellite states, to give them a power capable of genuine influence.

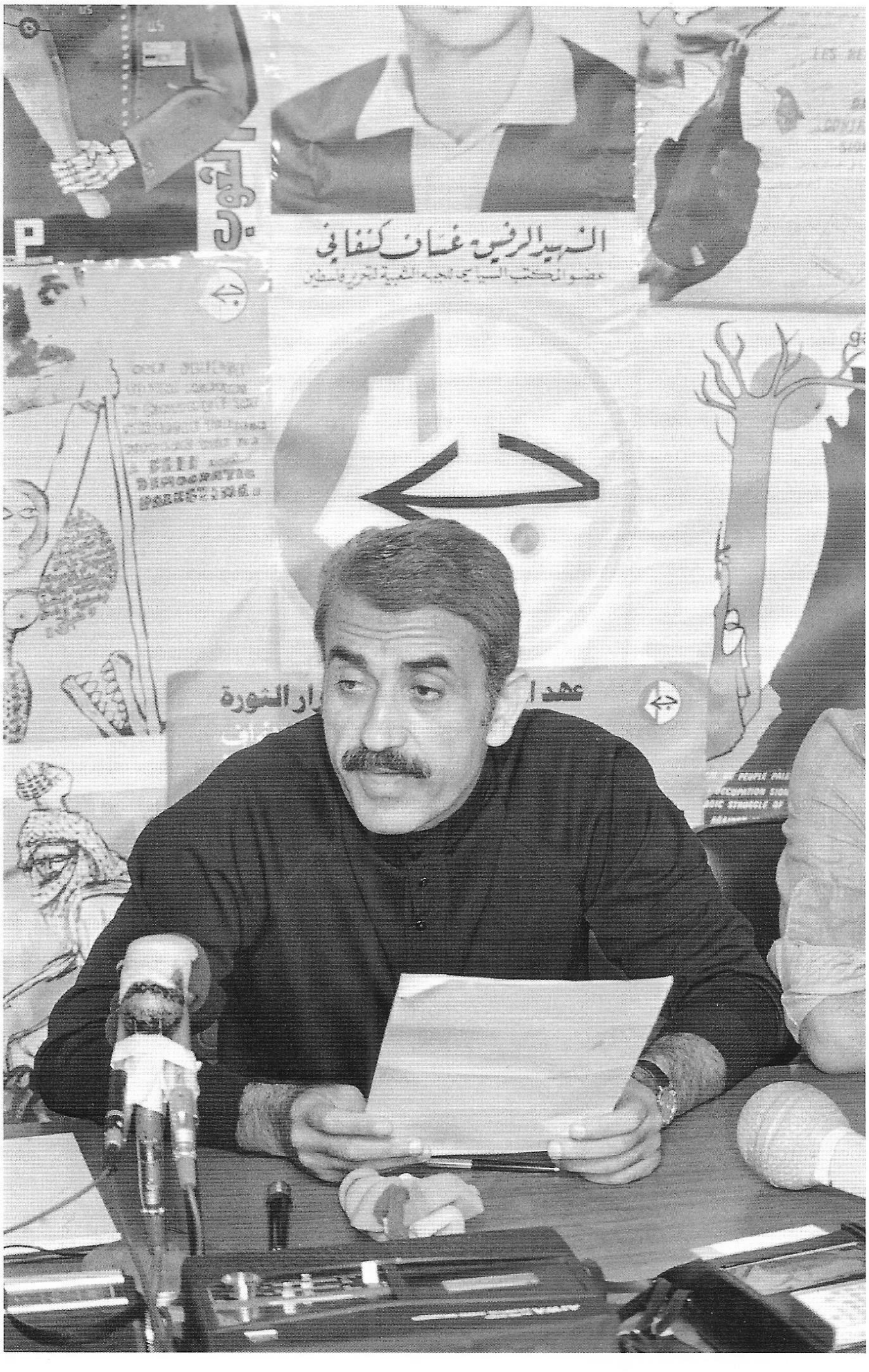
Terrorism also became international in scope during the 1970s. Terrorist groups realized that in an age of global economies, greater leverage could be applied by both working together across borders and by targeting symbols of national identity. If anywhere was a 'hub' for international terrorism it was the Middle East. The bitter ongoing conflict between the Arab nations and the State of Israel not only meant periodic conventional war, but also an active insurgency by groups either in or representing Israeli-occupied Palestine. The most powerful insurgency group was the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), formed in 1967 and acting as an umbrella organization for several militia factions, including Yasser Arafat's al-Fatah and the left-wing Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), headed by veteran Arab insurgent Dr George Habash. (Note that the PFLP split from the PLO in September 1974, in response to the PLO's attempt to seek a binational resolution to the Palestine–Israel situation.) In 1968, the PFLP hijacked an El Al airliner en route from Tel Aviv to Rome. Some commentators have argued that this incident constitutes the effective beginning of modern terrorism, the attempt to achieve goals through actions as symbolic as they were military. Such operations were as much about the media coverage obtained as any practical goals, especially as television was by the 1970s an international means of communication and persuasion.

Middle Eastern groups soon found sympathetic minds in the terrorist groups of Europe and Asia, enabling organizations like the PFLP to scale up their power through alliances, even if these alliances were scarcely grounded in any genuinely shared philosophy. Thus the PFLP was able to begin joint operations with both the Japanese Red Army (JRA) and the RAF, amongst others, in the 1970s. The non-Middle Eastern groups benefited from the alliance by accessing training grounds in Palestinian-controlled territories or in sympathetic Middle Eastern nations (such as Libya and Jordan), and in opening up new supply lines for acquiring armaments. (The USSR's support for the Arab cause meant that Soviet weaponry flowed freely through the Middle East and out to insurgency organizations across the world.)

Hijacking of airliners was only one of the tools of the terrorists during the 1970s, but few other actions carried the same media impact or political effect. By taking an airliner, terrorists could hold a contained group of hostages from the targeted state, plus increase international attention by the fact that the aircraft would also contain a variety of nationals aboard. By striking at international travel networks, terrorists were able to magnify their efforts exponentially, drawing in multiple governments through single operations.

On 6–9 September 1970, PFLP operatives successfully managed to hijack four airliners flying from Europe and Israel to New York. (A fifth hijack attempt on El Al flight 219 was foiled by onboard security personnel and passengers.) All aircraft were diverted, one ending up in Cairo while the other three eventually found themselves set down at the small airbase of Dawson's Field in Jordan. There the passengers were disembarked – there was only one injury inflicted in all the hijackings – and the planes were blown up with explosives.

The shock waves of the detonations carried political weight, as governments around the world attempted to adjust to the threat facing the international airspace. Incidents came thick and fast. Between 1967 and 1976 there were a



Dr George Habash, head of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), makes an address during a press conference in 1975. Habash became an inspiration for many imitative terrorist groups throughout Europe. (Press Association)

total of 385 hijacking incidents worldwide. Airport terminals themselves became targets. On 30 May 1972, for example, PFLP and JRA terrorists launched a gun attack on a passenger terminal at Lod Airport, Israel (today's Ben Gurion International Airport). By the time the terrorists were either killed or incapacitated, they had murdered 26 people and wounded 78 others. Similarly, on 17 December 1973 Palestinian terrorists conducted a bomb attack on Fiumicino Airport, Rome, killing 32 people and injuring 50.

In many ways, it seemed that by the mid 1970s the international community was losing the battle against terrorism. Yet the true picture had a slightly more complex tapestry. Basic security lessons were learnt, such as the implementation of bag searches and identity checks at all international airports from 1972, and most developed countries began the creation or adaptation of special forces units to the counter-terrorist role. (See the next chapter for more details.) The latter measure began to pay particular dividends as the decade wore on. On 9 May 1972, commandos from the elite Israeli Sayeret Matkal force conducted a fast-entry hostage-rescue mission aboard hijacked Sabena flight 572 at Tel Aviv Airport, killing two of the four hijackers and apprehending the surviving two. One passenger was killed during the action, but it sent a clear signal that counter-terrorism was now becoming a more serious enterprise. More prominently, on 4 July 1976 Israeli commandos flew into Entebbe Airport, Uganda, and rescued hostages held aboard Air France flight 139, killing all the hijackers in the process. (See feature box on p.28) The Entebbe action was a striking illustration of the professionalism that many more counter-terrorism forces would go on to obtain.

The Mogadishu rescue mission in 1977, the theme of this book, comes at a critical point in the war against terrorism during the 1970s. Counter-terrorist successes still seemed to be isolated counterpoints to the huge number of terrorist attacks, although fractures were appearing in the unity of international terrorist groups, and support was waning from traditional Middle Eastern state allies. What we do know is that following the Mogadishu operation, the number of aircraft-hijacking incidents worldwide dropped by nearly 25 per cent over the next decade, and continued to decrease throughout the 1980s and 1990s. This decline was due to a complex mix of political, security and state developments, but the actions of Germany's elite Grenzschutzgruppe 9 (GSG 9; Border Guard Group 9) that day in October 1977 also played their part.

ORIGINS

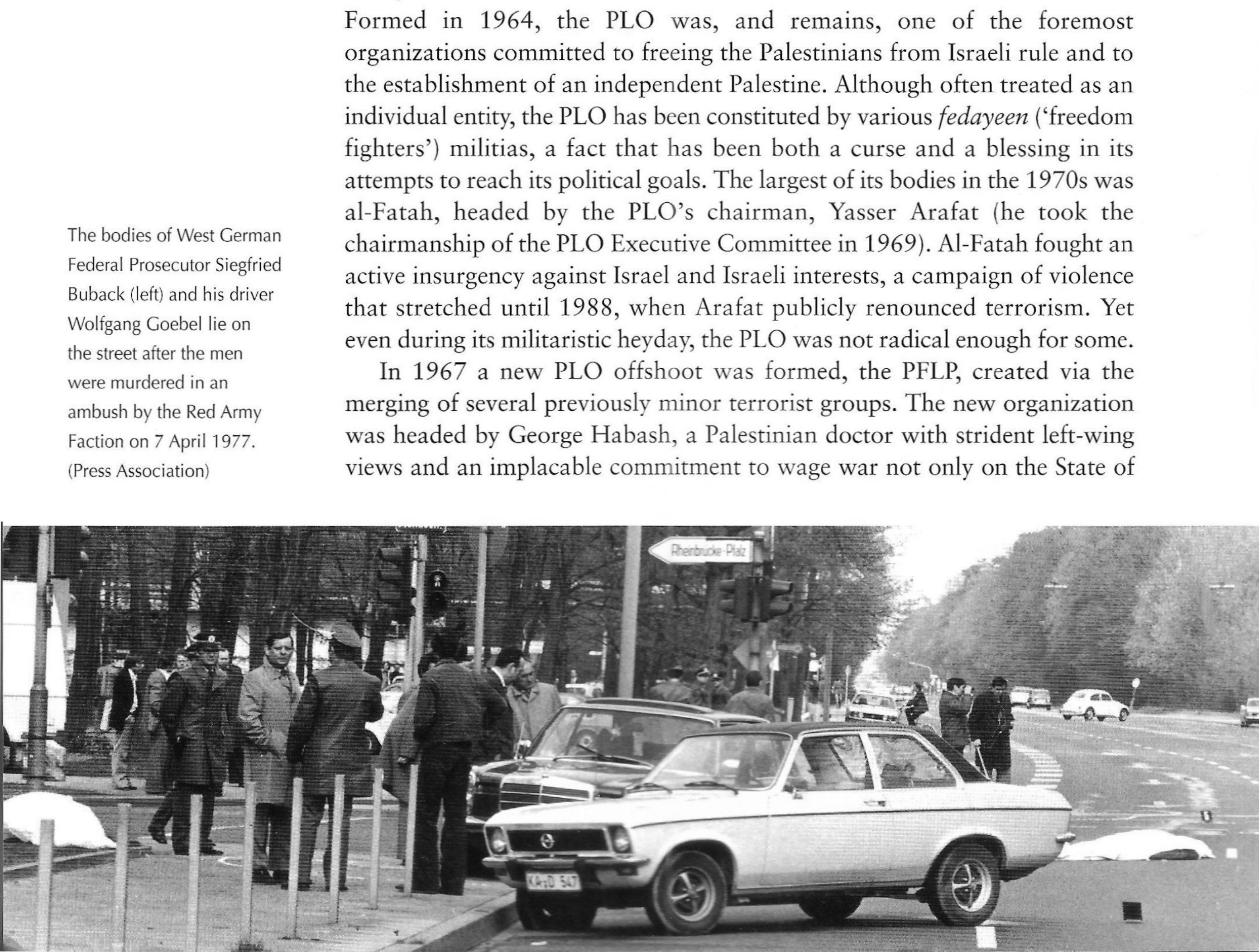
The hijacking of Lufthansa flight LH181 sits at the confluence of various different events, widely separated in geography but united in politics. At the heart of the incident, however, was the PLO, and its breakaway group, the PFLP.

PLO/PFLP

Formed in 1964, the PLO was, and remains, one of the foremost organizations committed to freeing the Palestinians from Israeli rule and to the establishment of an independent Palestine. Although often treated as an individual entity, the PLO has been constituted by various *fedayeen* ('freedom fighters') militias, a fact that has been both a curse and a blessing in its attempts to reach its political goals. The largest of its bodies in the 1970s was al-Fatah, headed by the PLO's chairman, Yasser Arafat (he took the chairmanship of the PLO Executive Committee in 1969). Al-Fatah fought an active insurgency against Israel and Israeli interests, a campaign of violence that stretched until 1988, when Arafat publicly renounced terrorism. Yet even during its militaristic heyday, the PLO was not radical enough for some.

In 1967 a new PLO offshoot was formed, the PFLP, created via the merging of several previously minor terrorist groups. The new organization was headed by George Habash, a Palestinian doctor with strident left-wing views and an implacable commitment to wage war not only on the State of

The bodies of West German Federal Prosecutor Siegfried Buback (left) and his driver Wolfgang Goebel lie on the street after the men were murdered in an ambush by the Red Army Faction on 7 April 1977. (Press Association)



Israel, but also upon the 'imperialist' Western governments and traditionalist Arab states. This compulsion was driven by his personal experience of expulsion from his homeland in 1948 by the Israelis, and by living in the dreadful refugee camps dotted around the countries neighbouring Palestine. He put this point eloquently in a speech delivered in Amman on 12 June 1970:

1967

Formation of the PFLP

> We don't wake up in the morning to have a cup of milk with Nescafé and then spend half an hour before the mirror thinking of flying to Switzerland or having one month in this country or one month in that country. We don't have the thousands of millions of dollars that you in America and Britain have. We live daily in camps. Our wives wait for the water, whether it will come at 10 o'clock in the morning, 12 o'clock or 3 o'clock in the afternoon. We cannot be calm as you can. We cannot think as you think. We have lived in this condition, not for one day, not for 2 days, not for 3 days. Not for one week, not for 2 weeks, not for 3 weeks. Not for one year, not for 2 years, but for 22 years. If any one of you comes to these camps and stays for one or two weeks, he will be affected. He cannot think and handle things regardless of the conditions he will be living . . . We will defend ourselves and our revolution by every way and every means, because – as I told you – our code of morals is our revolution. Anything that protects our revolution would be right.[1]

Habash was aided in both the establishment of the PFLP, and the running of its operations, by another Palestinian doctor, Wadi Haddad. He attained greater international prominence after he rescued Habash from a Syrian jail in 1968.

From the start, airliner hijacks were central to the PFLP modus operandi, insurgents seizing an El Al flight from Rome to Tel Aviv in July 1968 and perpetrating the Dawson's Field hijackings two years later. Shortly before this latter incident, in June 1970, *Life* magazine published an interview with Habash in which he clearly spelt out his policy of targeting airlines:

> Let us for a moment leave out Europe, and concentrate on Israel. From an economical and political point of view Israel is an island isolated from its friends and surrounded by enemy lands: Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt. Its communications with friendly nations can take place only through the air and the sea; therefore it becomes imperative for us to block these avenues . . . We have been taking care for some time now of the air routes by striking at the planes of El Al, the Israeli airline. El Al airplanes are a perfectly legitimate military target: they belong to the enemy, they connect the island of Israel to other shores, and they transport troops and ammunition. They are flown by reserve officers of the Israeli Air Force. In a war it is fair to strike the enemy wherever he happens to be, and this rule leads us also to the European airfields where El Al planes land and take off.[2]

5 SEPTEMBER 1972

The Munich Massacre

The point made in the last sentence of this quotation is critical. The interviewer recognized its importance and challenged Habash, noting that this policy effectively targeted citizens of neutral countries. Habash responded by challenging the very notion of neutrality, arguing that 'Countries like Germany, Italy, France and Switzerland, with many Jews among their population, allow their territory to be used as a base for the Jews to fight the Arabs.'[3]

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[1] Source: PFLP archive: http://www.pflp.ps/english/?q=1970-speech-al-hakim-dr-george-habash-amman-jordan

[2] Oriana Fallaci, 'A leader of the *fedayeen*: 'We want a war like the Vietnam War', *Life* (12 June 1970)

Terrorism in Germany

Taking the PFLP war to countries outside of the Middle East required organization, planning and also friends. In the case of Germany, a major supporter was the 'Baader–Meinhof Gang' (a media label, rather than a self-given title), which evolved into the RAF.

The decade from 1968 to 1977 has been called by some historians of German history the 'Crisis Years'. The label is apt. During this period the German establishment was rocked by an explosion of home-grown and imported terrorism, riding on the back of the radical student movement that developed during the 1960s. One of the most prominent figures in the rising tide of German terrorism was radical Andreas Baader, who collected a small group of followers and began a violent revolutionary campaign, beginning with the bombing of two Frankfurt department stores in 1968. Arrested and imprisoned for the crime, Baader was busted from jail in May 1970 by left-wing intellectual Ulrike Meinhof and associates, an action that cemented both their international notoriety and their media title.

Despite having a rather vague terrorist agenda compared with the PFLP, the Baader–Meinhof Gang nevertheless built a strong working relationship with the Palestinians. Leading members of the German group made their way to Jordan, where they spent time at PFLP training bases refining their skills in weapons handling and operations planning. After some months of training, the German operatives then returned covertly to their homeland and began a systematic campaign of bombings, assassinations and, to fund their activities, bank raids. They also took on a new official title – Red Army Faction – inspired by the activities of the JRA.

The RAF saw themselves as 'urban guerrillas', warriors fighting against a capitalist hegemony that exploited workers the world over, and exported state-approved violence into countries such as Vietnam and regions such as the Middle East. An RAF communiqué, entitled 'The Urban Guerrilla Concept' and dated April 1971, gave an insight into the group's militarized state of mind:

> The idea of the urban guerrilla comes from Latin America . . . The urban guerrilla struggle is founded upon the understanding that there will be no Prussian-style marching orders, which so many so-called revolutionaries wait for to lead them into the revolutionary struggle. It is based upon analysis that by the time the conditions are right to launch into armed struggle, it will be too late to prepare for it. It is based on the recognition that without revolutionary activity in a country as potentially violent as the

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[3] Ibid.

> German Federal Republic, there will be no revolutionary movement when the conditions for revolutionary struggle are right, as they soon will be overcome by the political and economic developments of late capitalism . . . The urban guerrilla aims to destroy key elements of the state structure, and to crush the myth of state power and invulnerability.[4]

For the first four years of the 1970s, the terrorists did indeed 'crush the myth of state power and invulnerability'. On numerous occasions following terrorist attacks, the members of the RAF evaded capture and sent taunting letters to the German press, stating their clear intentions to disrupt and destabilize German society in the name of revolution. They achieved all this despite having a core active membership of about 20 members, plus a few hundred more passive supporters. Adding to the German government's problems were the activities of external terrorist groups, who in September 1972 would perpetrate one of history's most notorious terrorist actions, and on German soil.

Munich and the response

In 1972 Germany hosted the Olympic Games, the venue being Munich. It was a moment that indicated Germany's full rehabilitation into the international community after World War II, and yet it turned into an event characterized by tragedy. In the early morning of 5 September, eight members of the Palestinian 'Black September' movement crept into the Olympic Village and burst into an apartment containing Israeli athletes. In a violent encounter in which the Israeli athletes and coaches fought back bravely, two athletes were killed before the terrorists finally gained control of nine surviving hostages. The situation played itself out to a dreadful end, when all the remaining hostages plus a police officer were killed during a botched rescue mission by the Munich police at Fürstenfeldbruck Airport. Five terrorists died and three were captured.

The Munich Massacre, as it has become known, showed the limitations of the German response to terrorism. Regular police officers and marksmen were no longer enough to combat highly trained and motivated terrorist cells. In recognition of this fact, on 19 September the German government authorized the creation of a specialist counter-terrorism force, which would be part of the police Bundesgrenzschutz (Federal Border Guard). Known as GSG 9, the unit was officially given the following responsibilities:

> The GSG 9 is to be applied to carry out police operations of special importance. They may above all be used in cases where the situation requires a single operation, whether openly or in secret, directing immediate force against violence criminals. This is especially the case should large, organized groups of terrorists become active.[5]

Although part of the police, GSG 9 was essentially a fully militarized special forces unit. Its operatives wore the green berets previously reserved for elite

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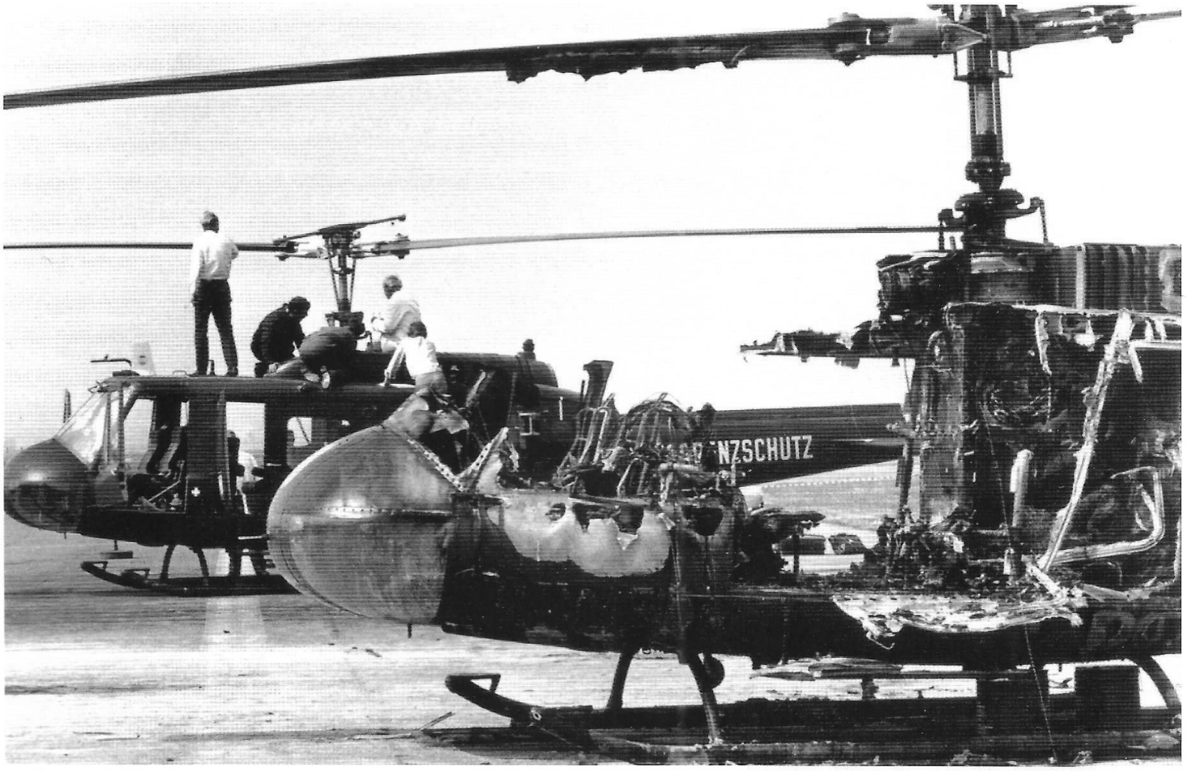
[4] RAF, 'The Urban Guerrilla Concept' (April 1971)

[5] Draft document on the duties of GSG 9, Conference of Ministers of the Interior (15 February 1974)



The scene at Fürstenfeldbruck air force base near Munich on 7 September 1972. The helicopters were used by terrorists to transport them and nine captured Israeli athletes, but a botched hostage-rescue mission resulted in the deaths of all the hostages. The helicopter in the foreground was destroyed after one of the terrorists detonated a grenade. (Press Association)

formations of the Bundeswehr, and its various sub-units were trained up in skills such as amphibious operations, hostage rescue, parachute deployment and demolitions. The driving force behind GSG 9's practical formation and training was its commander, Colonel Ulrich Wegener. Wegener was a Bundesgrenzschutz officer who served as liaison officer for German Interior Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, and who had personally witnessed the unfolding tragedy of the Munich Massacre. To make sure his new unit was up to scratch, Wegener arranged liaison with both the British Special Air Service (SAS) and the Israeli Sayeret Matkal. (Wegener himself spent four weeks undergoing training with an Israeli parachute brigade.) These were still the early days of modern special forces development, so Wegener had to create a force largely without equivalent models, doing justice to both its missions and its police status. Nevertheless, the fact remained that by the end of 1973, Germany had its own specialized counter-terrorist force, ready to be tested.

19 SEPTEMBER 1972

Formation of GSG 9

In June 1972 the German police seemed to experience something of a breakthrough in their war against the internal terrorists. In the first two weeks of the month, they managed to apprehend the key members of the RAF, including Andreas Baader, Ulrike Meinhof, Holger Meins, Jan-Carl Raspe, Gudrun Ensslin and Brigitte Monhaupt. Meins subsequently died during a hunger strike, and Meinhof hanged herself in her prison cell using a ripped-up towel. Most of the remaining prisoners were held in the high-security Stammheim prison near Stuttgart, awaiting a trial that did not begin until 1975. Yet the RAF still survived this blow at their leadership, and came back hard with their attempts to force the release of the prisoners. On 7 April 1977

A GSG 9 officer, seen here during the 1970s, cradles his suppressed Heckler & Koch MP5 sub-machine gun. The creation of GSG 9 meant that Germany had an effective militarized response to the growing phenomenon of terrorism. (Press Association)

the Federal German Prosecutor, Siegfried Buback, was shot dead along with his driver and bodyguard while their car was stopped at traffic lights. On 30 July, Jürgen Ponto, the head of Dresdner Bank, was shot and killed in front of his house when an RAF kidnapping went awry. Then, on 5 September, came an event that would have a direct link to a violent hostage-rescue in East Africa just over two months later.

5 SEPTEMBER 1977

Hanns-Martin Schleyer kidnapped

If anyone stood as a representative of the German establishment, it was Hanns-Martin Schleyer. Born in 1915 into a conservative family (his father was a judge), Schleyer was heavily involved with the National Socialist party during the 1930s, joining both the Hitler Youth and then, in 1933, the SS. By the outbreak of World War II in 1939, Schleyer had risen to the rank of Untersturmführer. He was sent out to serve on the Eastern Front, but was moved back to a posting in Prague following an accidental injury. There he began to develop connections with key German businessmen, and rose to become one of the most successful German industrialists of the wartime period. Following three years (1945–48) in a prisoner-of-war camp, Schleyer put his career back on track by becoming the Secretary of the Chamber of Commerce in Baden-Baden, and two years later he joined the Daimler-Benz company, rising to take a seat on the board of directors during the 1960s. (He narrowly missed becoming the company's president.) He was also heavily involved in German government business organizations, and became president of both the Bundesvereinigung der Deutschen Arbeitgeberverbände (BDA; Confederation of German Employers' Associations) and the Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie (BDI; Federation of German Industry).

For the German state, Schleyer was a salient representative of German efforts to regenerate following the devastation of the war. The RAF had a quite different viewpoint. They would describe Schleyer as the 'fat magnate of the cream of the national economy' (see below), and soon transferred their enmity into practical action.

On 5 September 1977, Schleyer left work at the BDA offices in Cologne-Braunsfeld, heading out to his home in Cologne itself. Being branded as a 'Security Risk Level 3' by the government, Schleyer lived his life under armed protection for 24 hours a day. His chauffeur-driven Mercedes car, therefore, was also accompanied by a protection vehicle following a short distance behind, carrying three armed bodyguards – Reinhold Brandle, Roland Pieler and Helmut Ulmer. At around 1725hrs, Schleyer's car turned into Vincenz-State Strasse, but suddenly the driver stamped hard on the brakes. Directly in his path was a yellow Mercedes car, which was driving the wrong way down the one-way street. The chauffer's evasive options were also limited by the woman with the blue baby carriage off to one side, who seemed to push the carriage almost directly into the path of Schleyer's car, stopping it from swerving around the yellow Mercedes. Schleyer's car finally came to a stop, and the bodyguards' vehicle, unable to stop in time, rammed into the back. It was now that the true purpose of the incident became clear. Five armed terrorists appeared: two jumped out of the yellow Mercedes, two from a VW camper van parked nearby, and one was an apparent bystander (actually he was the spotter for the operation, giving the signal for when to block the road). They immediately began to spray the vehicles with fire from shotguns and automatic weapons. With the element of surprise firmly on their side, and capitalizing on mistakes made by the security detail, they had the advantage. The bodyguards were all killed in a hail of bullets, and the chauffeur was shot dead as he attempted to help his passenger. Schleyer, however, survived, and the terrorists then hauled him from the vehicle, dragged him into the VW van, and sped off.

The kidnap of Hanns-Martin Schleyer was conducted with a professionalism and efficiency almost worthy of special forces soldiers, and shows the levels of proficiency to which terrorists rose during the 1970s. The group behind the kidnapping was, as expected, the RAF. On 6 September they delivered a letter to the Protestant Dead of Wiesbaden, which ran as follows:

> On Monday September 5, 1977, the Siegfried Hausner Commando took Hanns-Martin Schleyer, the President of the Federation of German Industries and the President of the Employers Association, captive. In terms of the conditions for his release, we will repeat our first communiqué to the federal government, which we now know has been suppressed since yesterday by the security staff. That is, all aspects of the search for us must be stopped immediately or Schleyer will be shot immediately. As soon as the search

stops, Schleyer will be released under the following conditions: RAF prisoners Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin, Jan-Carl Raspe, Verena Becker, Werner Hoppe, Karl-Heinz Dellwo, Hanna Krabbe, Bernd Rössner, Ingrid Schubert and Irmgard Möller must be released in exchange for Schleyer, and must be free to travel to a country of their choosing. Günter Sonnenberg, who is not fit for imprisonment due to a gunshot injury he incurred during his arrest, must be immediately released. The warrant for his arrest must be lifted. Günter will leave with the ten other prisoners, with whom he must immediately unite so they can hold discussions. The prisoners must be assembled at 8:00am on Wednesday at Frankfurt Airport. Between then and their departure at 12:00 noon, they must be allowed to talk freely and openly amongst themselves. At 10:00am, one of the prisoners will enter into direct communication with the commando via German television to inform us that their departure is going as planned.

For purposes of public oversight, and to protect the prisoners' lives between take-off and landing, we propose that the prisoners be accompanied by Payot, the General Secretary of the United Nations' International Federation of Human Rights, and Pastor Niemöller. We request that they accept this role to ensure that the prisoners arrive at their chosen destination alive. Naturally, we would agree to any alternative proposal from the prisoners.

Each prisoner will be given 100,000 DM. This communiqué, which can be authenticated by Schleyer's photo and his letter, must be broadcast unedited and unaltered on the Tagesschau this evening at 8:00pm. We will finalize the details for freeing Schleyer as soon as we receive confirmation that the prisoners have been freed, that they won't be extradited, and when the federal government releases a statement guaranteeing that it won't apply for extradition. We assume that Schmidt, who in Stockholm showed how quickly he can make decisions, will be equally quick this time given his personal connections to this fat magnate of the cream of the national economy.

Siegfried Hausner Commando[6]

The handwritten note from Schleyer, referred to in the letter, also assured the German government that any attempts to either find or rescue him would result in his immediate execution.

Schleyer's kidnapping was one of the worst moments in Germany's struggle against terrorism, the beginning of what was labelled the 'German autumn'. The German establishment seemed to go into a fortress mentality, fearful of additional kidnaps and the fact that a handful of unbalanced activists appeared capable of controlling the entire German government's agenda. The Chancellor, Helmut Schmidt, stepped up to take personal control of the situation, and a complete communication blackout was placed upon the RAF prisoners in Stammheim to prevent their giving instructions to RAF operatives in the outside world. Yet there was still the distinct possibility that the German government might be forced to concede to the RAF demands and release the Stammheim prisoners. Soon, however, a new crisis arose.

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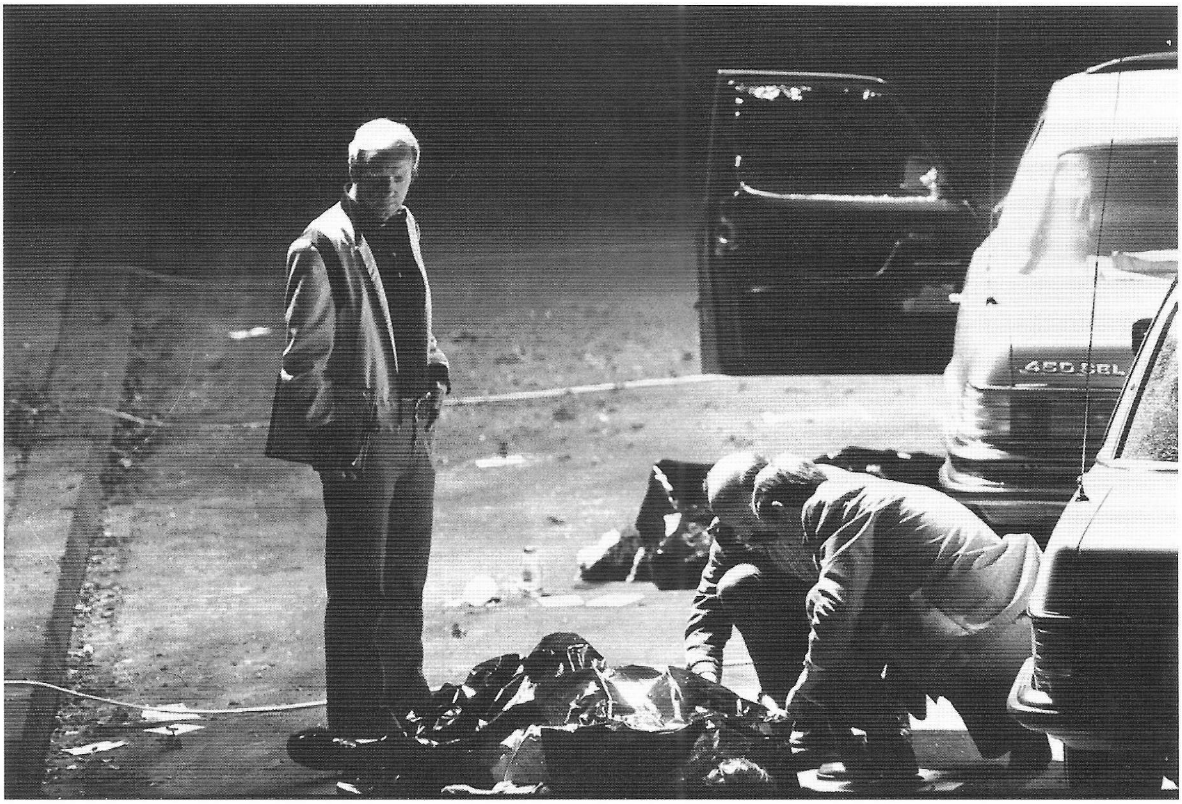
[6] RAF communiqué (6 September 1977)



Where it all began. Police investigate the crime scene in Cologne where Hanns-Martin Schleyer was kidnapped by members of the Red Army Faction. Here the police examine the body of one of Schleyer's three bodyguards; the corpse of another bodyguard or Schleyer's chauffeur lies in front, next to Schleyer's car. (Press Association)

The hijack of LH181

At 1330hrs on 13 October 1977, Lufthansa flight LH181 took off from Palma Airport on the island of Majorca, destination Frankfurt in Germany. (The aircraft was known by the name *Landshut*, which described a village in eastern Bavaria.) A Boeing 737-200 series aircraft it carried 86 passengers and five crew members. Captain of the aircraft was Jürgen Schumann, a 37-year-old former F-105 Starfighter pilot, and he was aided in flying the aircraft by his co-pilot, Jürgen Vietor (35). Looking after the passengers were three cabin crew. These consisted of the chief stewardess, Hannelore Piegler (33), plus stewardesses Anna-Maria Staringer (28) and Gabriele Dillmann (23). All the crew would undergo the most astonishing ordeal over the next five days, and one of them would lose his life.

Following take-off, LH181 gained altitude out over the Mediterranean, and settled into its northerly course for Germany. Yet as the aircraft was approaching Marseilles, all normality came to an end. In the first-class compartment, two Arabic individuals, a man and a woman, suddenly leapt to their feet, screaming aggressively. The man was brandishing a handgun, while the woman clutched two hand grenades. Hannelore Piegler was hit hard in the face as she went through from economy to first class to investigate. Seconds later two more terrorists, a man and a woman, made themselves known in the economy compartment, once again displaying guns and grenades while screaming for all the passengers to hold their hands up. In an indication of how easy it was to evade contemporary airport security, the four hijackers had managed to get on

WEAPONS OF THE LH181 HIJACKERS

The hijackers of LH181 used a mix of firearms and explosive devices to take control of flight LH181. In terms of firearms, the terrorists took aboard two pistols: a Russian Tokarev 7.62mm automatic handgun, and another auto, a Makarov 9mm. The ammunition capacity of each of these two weapons is eight rounds, meaning that the terrorists could theoretically deliver a co-ordinated barrage of about 16 rounds before reloading. Of far greater potential significance for the future hostage-rescue mission, was the presence of explosives amongst the hijackers' arsenal. They had with them six hand grenades of various makes, including some home-made varieties. The most powerful explosives, however, were 1.5kg (3.3lb) of PETN plastic explosive. This quantity of explosive was quite capable of destroying the aircraft. By way of example, in 1983 a terrorist bombing against the Maison de France building in Berlin, using just 6kg (13.2lb) more PETN than that possessed by the LH181 hijackers, virtually destroyed the entire building.

board with two Eastern European automatic pistols, six hand grenades and a quantity of plastic explosive. (See feature box.) They had used a cosmetics case and a hollowed-out radio to bring several of the items on board.

Gaby Dillmann later recounted the horror of those first moments of the hijack:

> We were all herded back like cattle, into the rear part of the cabin, and we had to put our hands above our heads. Then we were told this was a hijacking and we were to keep quiet, anyone who didn't keep quiet would be shot. We'd be shot for talking, for lowering our hands, well, basically we'd be shot unless we just breathed very quietly and kept our hands up. We all did what they said. What else could we do? Act like heroes and get shot? What good would that do? And then we thought, the RAF . . . because we knew there'd be huge difficulties, with the Federal Government guarding them like some kind of precious treasure in a high-security jail. And those were the people they wanted. But we knew at once it would be difficult. We really thought, there are so many of us, and so few of them, it had to happen that way, a law of humanity.[7]

The leader of the terrorist cell, Zohair Akache, went forward to the flight deck. Vietor remembered the moment: 'The cockpit door was flung open and someone was standing there with a gun pointing it at Captain Schumann. He yelled, "Out, out, out!" and kicked me in the ribs. I was pushed or shoved to the rear.'[8] Forced into a seat, Vietor was then relieved of his pilot's cap, which Mahmud then placed upon his head and announced that he was the leader of the hijack team, and that he was now in control of the aircraft. Returning to the cockpit, Mahmud announced that the aircraft was now in the hands of the PFLP.

13 OCTOBER 1977

1330hrs Lufthansa flight LH181 takes off

Once in command of the aircraft, Akache's first practical demand was that Schumann fly the aircraft to Rome. Realizing that any sort of resistance

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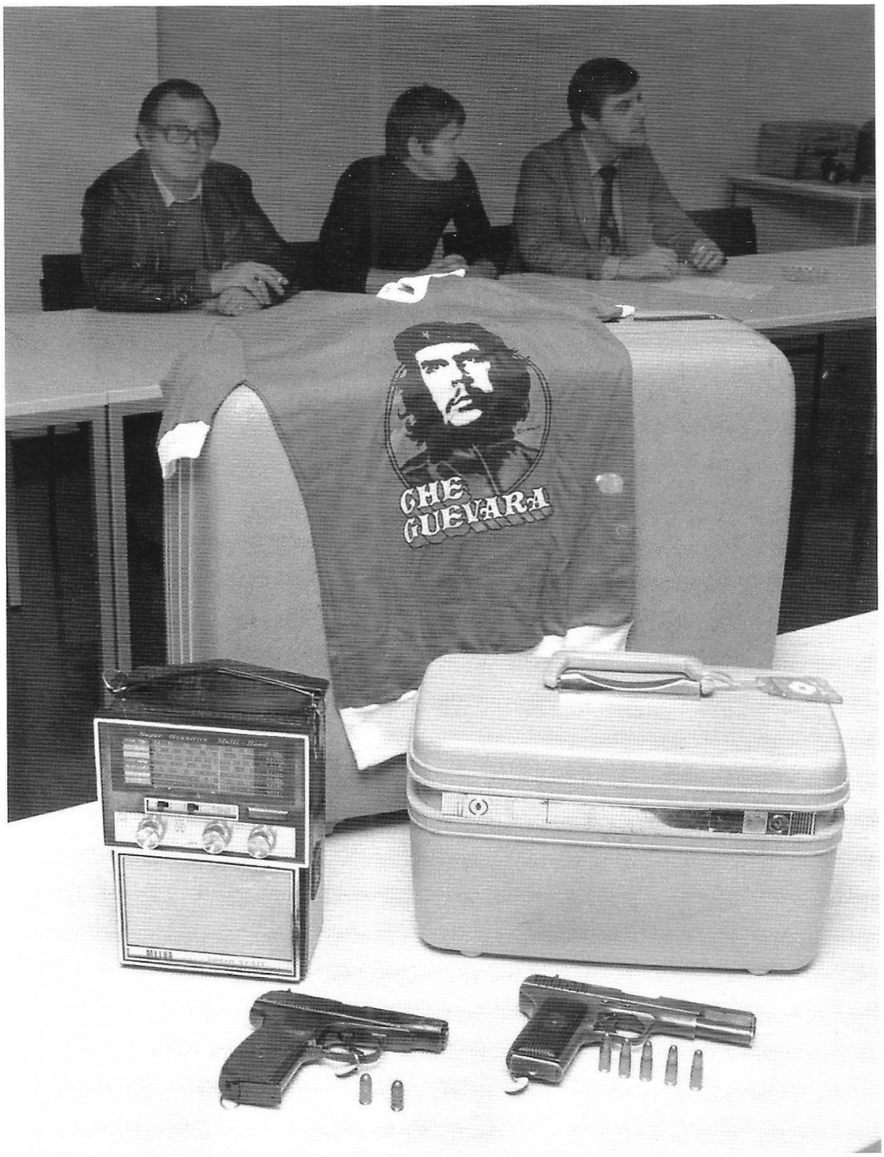
[7] Quoted in Stefan Aust, *Baader-Meinhof: The Inside Story of the R.A.F.* Bodley Head, London (2008) p.374

[8] Interview for Discovery Channel television documentary 'Special Force Heroes: Terror in the Skies'



Items used and worn by the terrorists on LH181 are displayed at a press conference following the rescue mission. The two handguns are a Soviet Makarov (left) and a Hungarian-made Tokarev; behind them are the radio and make-up case used to smuggle the weapons in. Draped over the suitcase is the distinctive T-shirt worn by most of the terrorists. (Press Association)

would do little more than endanger the lives of the passengers Schumann complied, with the masterful calmness that he went on to display throughout the whole hijacking. The aircraft touched down at Rome at 1545hrs, by which time the German authorities were becoming aware of a nightmare scenario developing.

PFLP cell

So who were the four people who had now taken over the aircraft? Zohair Youssif Akache – alias Captain Martyr Mahmud – was a 22-year-old radical who had joined the PFLP shortly after leaving high school. His early life was typical of the misery that bred so many terrorists during the 1960s and 70s. Akache was actually born in Beirut, but spent his developmental years suffering the frustrations of an existence in the Burj el-Brajneh refugee

Relatives of those trapped aboard the *Landshut* gather around as a Lufthansa representative reads out the names of those on the passenger list. For many relatives, the only source of information was through the press, TV and radio, not always the most accurate sources. (Press Association)

camp, his parents being Palestinians forced out of their country in 1948. He was an intelligent and self-disciplined individual, who came to London in the early 1970s to study aeronautical engineering at the Chelsea College of Aeronautical and Automobile Engineering. As part of his interest in aviation, he also took flying lessons, learning to pilot a Cessna aircraft. (His knowledge of aviation would later become significant for the hijack of flight LH181.) His time in London brought him into friction with the British authorities, however, who were keeping a close eye on him anyway as he was a known PFLP member. He was arrested for attacking a policeman during a Free Palestine protest in 1974, although he was released soon after, and in March 1976 he repeated the crime at another rally. Akache spent six months incarcerated in Pentonville Prison, then was expelled from Britain.

Undeterred, this resourceful individual entered Britain several more times from 1976 to 1977, each time bypassing security systems by using false passports. Evidence suggests that it was Akache who conducted the murder of al-Qadi Abdulla al-Harj, the former prime minister of North Yemen, plus his wife and an associated diplomat outside the Bayswater Hotel in London on 10 April 1977. The operation clarified what a ruthless individual he could be: he shot all three people in the head at close range, using a silenced pistol. Britain's Scotland Yard also had Akache as the number one suspect in the murders, but unfortunately he was allowed to slip out of the country.

Supporting Akache in the hijack of LH181 were three other individuals. Hind Alameh (22), alias Shanaz Gholoun, was at the time of the hijacking Akache's fiancée. A Lebanese Christian, she had become a keen supporter of the Palestinian left during her late teens. The other female hijacker was Suhaila Sayeh (22), alias Soraya Ansari, a Palestinian forced out of her country with her family during the 1960s, and who had survived the horror of the Tal al-Zaater refugee camp massacre on 12 August 1976, during the Lebanese Civil War. Completing the cell was 23-year-old Wabil Harb (alias Riza Abbasi), a young man from a wealthy Lebanese background who gained much combat experience while fighting in the Lebanese war, in which he was known for his fanaticism.

The four had been brought together by the PFLP shortly before the hijacking operation, each bringing the requisite mix of hijacking skills and political fanaticism. Akache's basic experience with aviation made him a natural leader for the operation, as it would be harder for the air crew to buy him off with falsehoods during the hijack.

The hijackers of LH181 took advantage of poor security arrangements at many of Europe's airports in the 1970s. They had flown into Majorca a week before the operation, and immediately set about attempting to book flights out of the island with their targeted airline – Lufthansa. Travel agency staff later noted the peculiar insistence of the individuals that they had to fly on Lufthansa. Any offers to fly on alternative airlines, such as Iberia, were refused, even though there was immediate availability on those flights. Finally, on 11 October, a Lufthansa Majorca–Frankfurt flight was found, courtesy of the Euroclub Agency located on Jamie III Street. Harb immediately booked two tickets, both for the first-class compartment. He paid in cash (US dollars), ensuring that he would leave no financial paper trail. Later that morning, Akache also went into a travel agency (Viajes Iberia SA, on Passeo Generalissimo Franco). He also booked two tickets, for the same flight as that taken by Harb, although this time he bought economy tickets.

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1545hrs Flight LH181 lands at Rome and the hijackers issue their demands

Having bought all four tickets, the terrorists now killed time for two days, and seemed to enjoy themselves. They stayed in expensive hotels, and even went out as a foursome one night to watch a flamenco show. On the evening before their flight, however, they became more serious. They packed a small amount of clothes, plus their firearms and explosives, and the next day headed out to Palma Airport. They went through airport customs on forged Iranian and Dutch passports. They were not searched, despite some of them appearing to carry no luggage whatsoever – a curious situation given that the flight was taking the passengers out of the country.

INITIAL STRATEGY

The first indications that a hijacking might be taking place came at 1438hrs (German time) on 13 October, when air traffic controllers in France noticed that LH181 had made a deviation from its planned route. Furthermore, Mahmud broadcast a furious-sounding radio transmission declaring that he had taken the aircraft under his 'supervision and control'. The VHP transmitter system fitted aboard the aircraft, however, was only a short-range system, and for the Germans themselves it became increasingly hard to track the aircraft's progress through the southern European aerospace. Yet just minutes prior to the aircraft's touchdown at Rome Airport, Helmut Schmidt was informed that a hijacking was possibly in progress, and a situation group was quickly established under the authority of the West German Minister of the Interior, Werner Maihofer.

13 OCTOBER 1977

c.1540hrs German government is informed about the hijack

At Frankfurt am Main Airport, the Lufthansa airline put together their own permanent crisis management team, seen here. The team consisted of engineers, pilots and other knowledgeable officials, and provided important technical advice to GSG 9. (Press Association)

Rome

It was during the aircraft's stop in Rome that the truth emerged more clearly. Mahmud relayed his demands across to the airport's control tower, and revealed the full extent of the interconnection between the hijack of the aircraft and the kidnapping of Schleyer. His demands included the release of all 11 RAF prisoners held in Germany. The full text of the hijack demands was later printed in *The Times* of London; it actually received the text just after the situation had been resolved at Mogadishu. The letter, after a long preamble explaining the philosophy behind the action, then gave the following demands;

> Ultimatum to the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of West Germany
>
> This is to inform you that the passengers and crew of the Lufthansa 737 plane, flight no. 181 leaving from Palma to Frankfurt, are under our complete control and responsibility. The lives of the passengers and crew of the plane, as well as the life of Dr Hanns-Martin Schleyer, depend on your fulfilling the following.
>
> 1. Release of the following comrades of the RAF (Rote Armee Fraktion) from prisons in West Germany – Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin, Jan-Carl Raspe, Verena Becker, Werner Hoppe, Karl-Heins Dellwo, Hanna Krabbe, Bernd Rossner, Ingrid Schubert, Irmgard Moller, Gunter Sonnenberg and with each the amount of DM100,000.
>
> 2. Release of the following Palestinian comrades of PFLP from prison in Istanbul – Mahdi and Hussein.
>
> 3. The payment of the sum of $15m according to accompanying instructions.
>
> 4. Arrange with any one of the following countries to accept to receive all the comrades released from prison: 1) Democratic Republic of Vietnam; 2) Republic of Somalia; 3) People's Democratic Republic of Yemen.
>
> 5. The German prisoners should be transported by plane, which you should provide, to their point of destination. They should fly via Istanbul to take in the two Palestinian comrades released from Istanbul prison. The Turkish Government is well informed about our demands.
>
>   The prisoners should altogether reach their point of destination before Sunday 16th of October, 1977, 8.00am GMT. The money should be delivered according to accompanying structures within the same period of time.
>
> 6. If all the prisoners are not released and do not reach their point of destination, and the money is not delivered according to instructions, within the specified time, then Dr Hanns-Martin Schleyer, and all the passengers and the crew of the Lufthansa 737 plane flight no. 181, will be killed immediately.
>
> 7. If you comply with our instructions all of them will be released.

13 October 1977. Bystanders park their cars around the perimeter fence of Rome airport to view LH181 standing on the tarmac. At Rome the hijackers demanded that the Italian authorities refuel the plane, or they would blow the aircraft up. (Press Association)

8. We shall not contact you again. This is our last contact with you. You are completely to blame for any error or faults in the release of the above mentioned comrades in prison or in the delivery of the specified ransom according to the specified instructions.

9. Any try on your part to delay or deceive us will mean immediate ending of the ultimatum and execution of Dr Hanns-Martin Schleyer and all the passengers and crew of the plane.[9]

Posted in Germany itself, and similar in structure to an earlier letter of demands related to the Schleyer kidnapping, this document illustrated the full extent of terrorist confidence in achieving their demands. Note, however, that on a verbal basis the terrorists' demands were not initially issued in one complete batch. Mahmud's stated demand for the release of the Palestinian prisoners, for example, came the next day when the aircraft was in Cyprus.

And yet right from the start, everything did not quite go according to plan for Mahmud and his gang. The 'one contact only' policy was quickly and repeatedly breached as the authorities of Italy and Germany played for time. As with the Schleyer kidnapping, Chancellor Schmidt resisted simple compliance with terrorist demands. GSG 9 was immediately informed, Wegener putting his team into a state of high alert and making preparations for immediate deployment. A key element of GSG 9 training had been aircraft assault, and the unit spent much time around German airports becoming

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[9] PFLP ultimatum, printed in *The Times* on 18 October 1977

SAS AND COUNTER-TERRORISM

Although the Special Air Service (SAS) dated back to World War II, at the beginning of the 1970s it had no purpose-designed counter-terrorist force. Conflicts such as those in Malaya (1950–60), Borneo (1963–66), Aden (1964–67) and Northern Ireland (1969 onwards) had, admittedly, given 22 SAS Regiment a wide-ranging experience of fighting insurgencies. Yet the events in Munich in 1972 not only galvanized the German government to establish GSG 9, they also pushed the British special forces community to establish its own unit dedicated to combating similar incidents. So it was that within just a few months of the Munich massacre, the SAS formed the Counter-Revolutionary Warfare (CRW) wing at its base in Hereford. By 1974, this section had in turn spawned a highly trained Counter-Terrorism Team (CTT) as part of the regiment's permanent establishment. Because of the prevalent threat from terrorist actions, particularly those relating to the ongoing Northern Ireland conflict, the CTT was a well-funded and highly trained unit, equipped with the best weaponry and technology then available. Although it did not publicize itself, the CTT began to gather a strong reputation both at home and abroad. In December 1975, for example, a four-man IRA team took a couple hostage in a house in Balcombe Street, London. The resultant siege went on for six days, but was finally broken merely by news reports that the SAS were preparing to take the house by force. The IRA members simply surrendered rather than face death. Throughout the 1970s, the SAS built strong training associations with both French and German special forces units.

familiar with all aspects of the civil aircraft that flew in and out of Germany every day. It had also given training to Lufthansa crews about what to do in hijacking situations, and had briefed certain crew members in delivering coded visual communications to hostage-rescue and negotiation teams. GSG 9 were perfectly suited to the challenge presented by the hijacking. Yet this would be their first major operation and they faced the burden of having to prove themselves in action under the spotlight of the world's media.

Using Israeli crisis-response models as inspiration, Schmidt established a crisis management team that included him and the ministers of the Interior, Justice and Foreign Affairs. The formidable German Minister of State, Hans-Jürgen Wischnewski, would also play a central role in the resolution of the LH181 crisis (see below). Schmidt began the process of telephoning round various international governments to gain their support and feedback. One important source of advice was the British Prime Minister, James Callaghan, who echoed Schmidt's sentiments that terrorists were not to be negotiated with. The British connection also put into play the eventual involvement of the SAS in the hostage-rescue efforts.

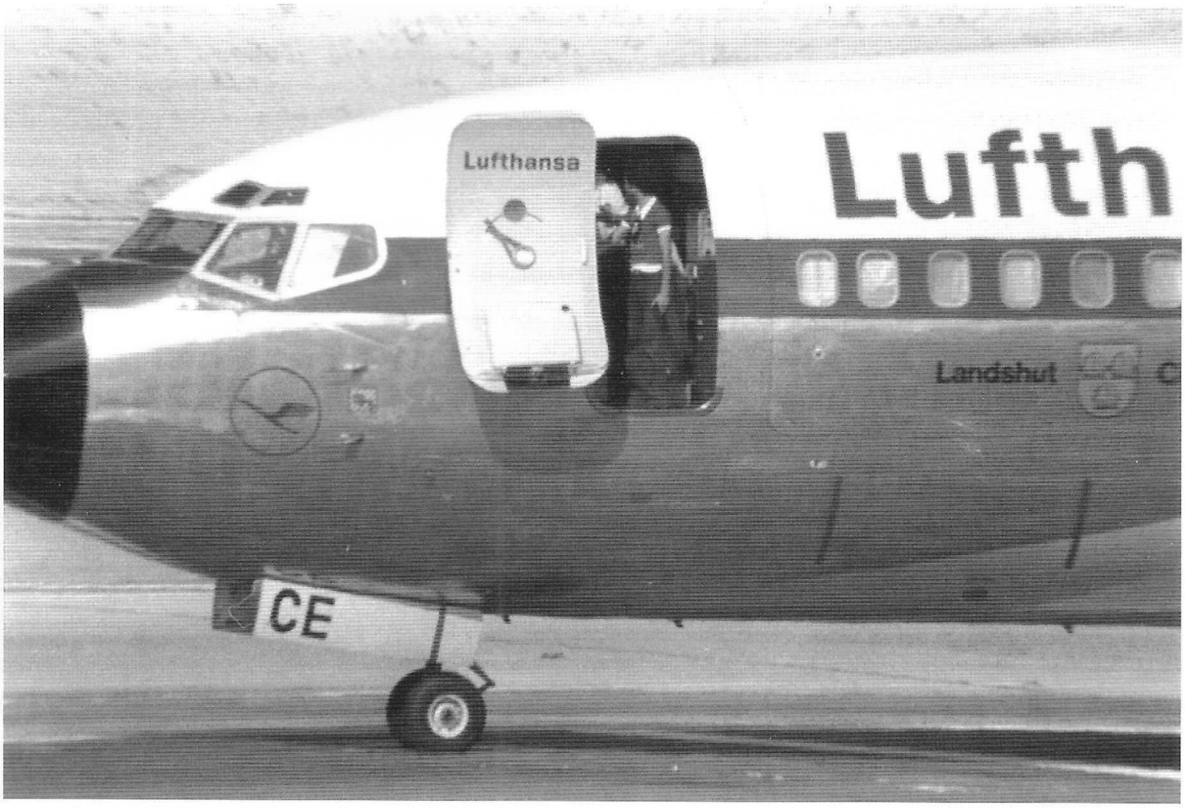
13 OCTOBER 1977

1742hrs Flight LH181 takes off from Rome airport

Back in Rome, the major demand from the hijackers was that the Italian authorities immediately refuel the aircraft. Initial Italian reluctance was overcome by Mahmud's threats to destroy the aircraft if fuel was not forthcoming. The aircraft was eventually refuelled, and at 1742hrs LH181 once again took off.

Larnaca and Bahrain

This time the aircraft was headed for Cyprus. Initially the destination was the airport at Nicosia, but when it was discovered that the airport was out of order Schumann instead flew the aircraft to Larnaca. It was while the aircraft was in



The self-styled 'Captain Mahmud' shows himself at the open door of Lufthansa flight LH181 during the hijack. He is in discussion with the ill-fated Captain Schumann, who stands in the aircraft's front galley. (Press Association)

Cyprus that the first serious attempts at negotiation were made with the terrorists aboard LH181. The first important voice to speak to the hijackers was that of the Cypriot Foreign Minister, who stated: 'Captain Mahmud, here is the Foreign Minister of Cyprus. I beg you in the name of the Cypriot government and people, and in the name of humanity, release all children, women and sick people on board. Please.' Mahmud then received an introduction from Saharia Abdul Rachmin, a PLO representative based in Cyprus. To both these requests for communication, Mahmud simply shouted back, 'I do not care who you are! Whoever you are, I do not want to talk to you!'

As LH181 sat at Larnaca, no one inside the aircraft knew that at that moment a Boeing 707, flight 1231, carrying Germany's response to the hijacking was already on its way to Cyprus. The aircraft, which had taken off at 1555hrs, not only included 30 members of GSG 9, but also various high-ranking officers from the German police forces and intelligence community, plus a host of diplomats, foreign policy experts and negotiators. If necessary, the GSG 9 operatives were ready to make an immediate assault on the hijacked aircraft, but a variety of different factors prevented this option. First, the aircraft wasn't able to land at Larnaca, but had to put down at the British airbase at Akrotiri, 80km (50 miles) away. Second, and more importantly, the Cypriot authorities were rather reluctant to see a German paramilitary force launch an ad hoc mission on Cypriot soil. The action required for a rapid attack was therefore largely smothered in bureaucratic negotiations. Yet in many ways the diplomatic hold-up was academic, for although there

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1555hrs Boeing 707 holding German hijack response team takes off from Germany

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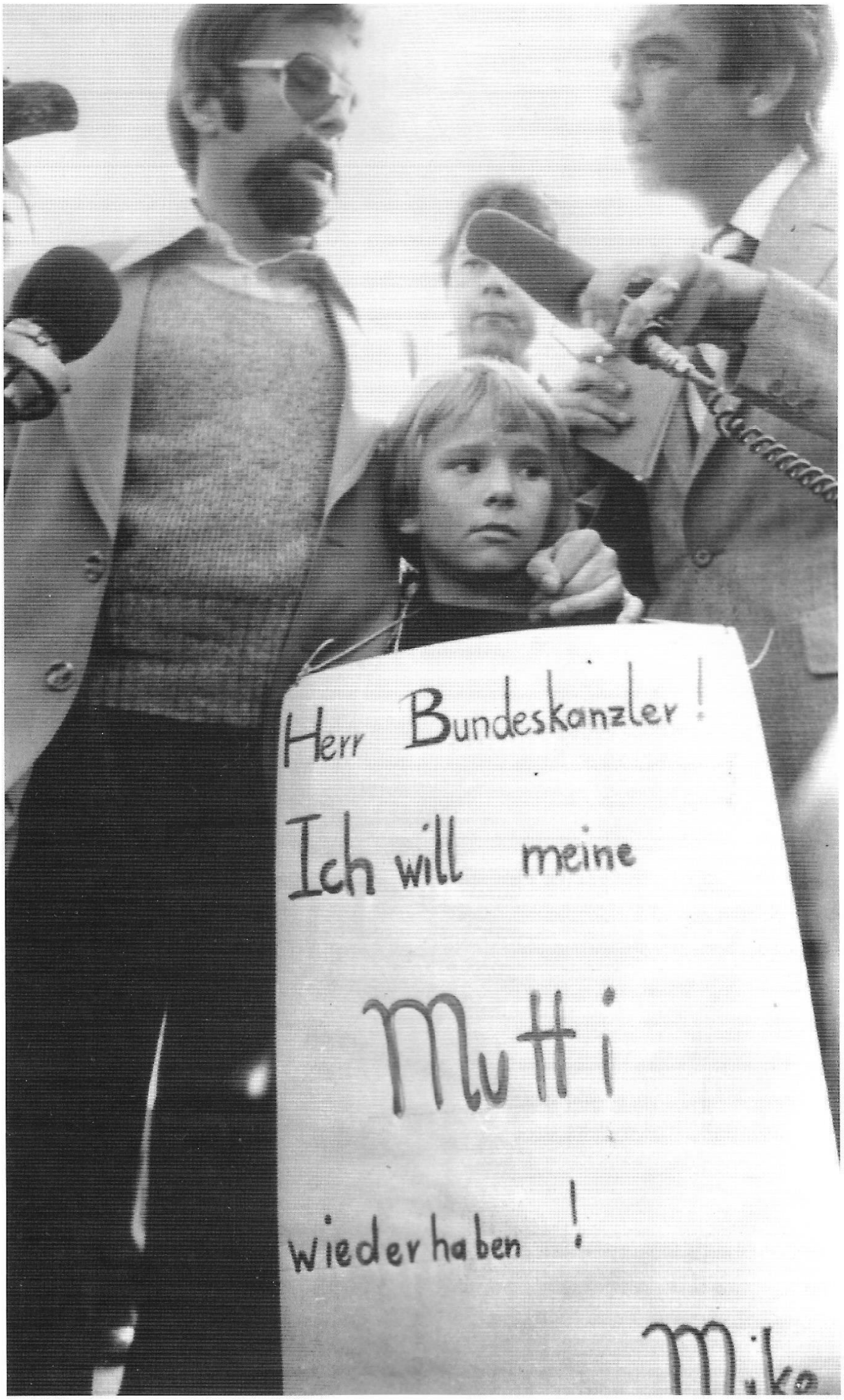
2250hrs Flight LH181 takes off from Larnaca airport

was a brief overlap when both aircraft were on the ground in Cyprus, LH181 managed to obtain some more fuel, and at 2250hrs it once again took off, this time destined for the Middle East. Shortly after LH181 had taken off, LH1231 flew on to Ankara in Turkey to await further instructions.



The husband of one of flight LH181's hostages talks with the media. His son stands in front bearing a placard that says: 'Mr Chancellor [a reference to Helmut Schmidt]. I want my mummy back. Mike.' As the hijack went on, public sympathy for a hard line against the terrorists wavered. (Press Association)

The next destination on Mahmud's itinerary was Beirut. Yet, as the terrorists would find on several occasions, the representatives of foreign airports were often naturally resistant to accepting hijacked aircraft, and Beirut bluntly refused the aircraft landing rights. This was the first of several such refusals. Schumann, ever aware of the aircraft's dwindling fuel supplies, then had to face further refusals to land at Damascus, Amman and Kuwait. Finally a reprieve came when the authorities at Bahrain Airport allowed a temporary landing, which was made at 0152hrs on 14 October.

14 OCTOBER 1977

0152hrs
Flight LH181 lands at Bahrain airport, and takes off again at 0324hrs

The stay at Bahrain would be a short one – the aircraft took off once again at 0324hrs. Yet during the stop there was one significant development, as author J. Paul De B. Taillon describes:

> During this stopover, the link between the Schleyer kidnappers and the hijackers became apparent when the latter forwarded their demands through the office of Denis Payot [a Swiss lawyer], the same intermediary employed by the Schleyer abductors. These demands were comparable to those issued for the return of Schleyer. The terrorists told authorities that if by 8:00 a.m. GMT, 16 October their demands were not met, the hostages, along with Dr. Schleyer, would be killed.[10]

The synergy between the hostage situations in Germany and, now, in the Middle East was becoming painfully clear to the German authorities, and made the process of negotiations that much more complex. Furthermore, as LH181 once again took off, the list of countries involved in the situation expanded, creating the need for delicate diplomacy.

Dubai

From Bahrain, Schumann then took LH181 on a two-and-a-half-hour flight to Dubai in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The period the aircraft spent at Dubai would be one of the most important staging posts on the route to the eventual hostage-rescue mission at Mogadishu. It was a time in which the preparations for a combat resolution of the situation gathered in intensity, and in which diplomacy became more frenetic. For the hostages on board the aircraft, however, it was a period in which fear and discomfort increased.

A key figure in this stage of the events was Wischnewski. As the German government's chief international negotiator, Wischnewski was a tough-minded and focused individual who was flown to Dubai aboard a Boeing 707 aircraft. Wischnewski's aircraft reached Dubai on Saturday 15 October, and Wegener himself arrived by a separate aircraft later in the day. One of Wischnewski's first roles was to reassure the government of the UAE that the Germans were not about to attempt another Entebbe by launching an unauthorized assault on the *Landshut*.

The priority for Wegener, by contrast, was information; at present, there were too few facts about what was going on inside the aircraft: 'It was very important for us to know a little bit more about the terrorists, of course. I was

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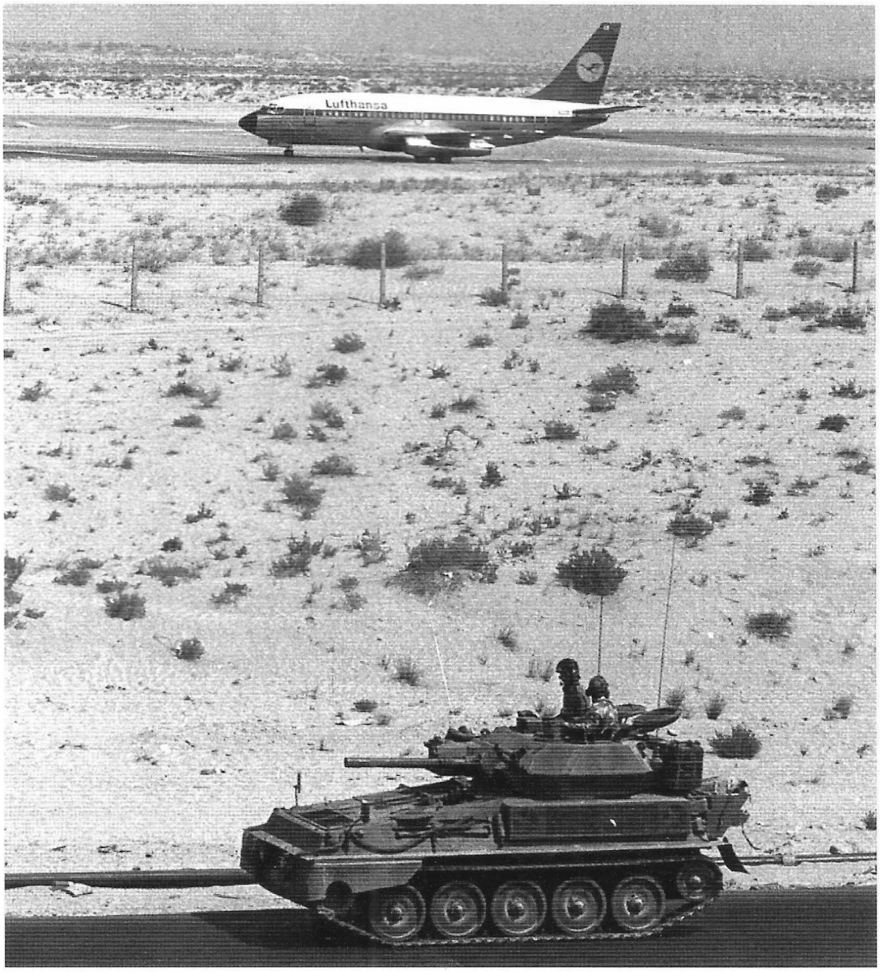
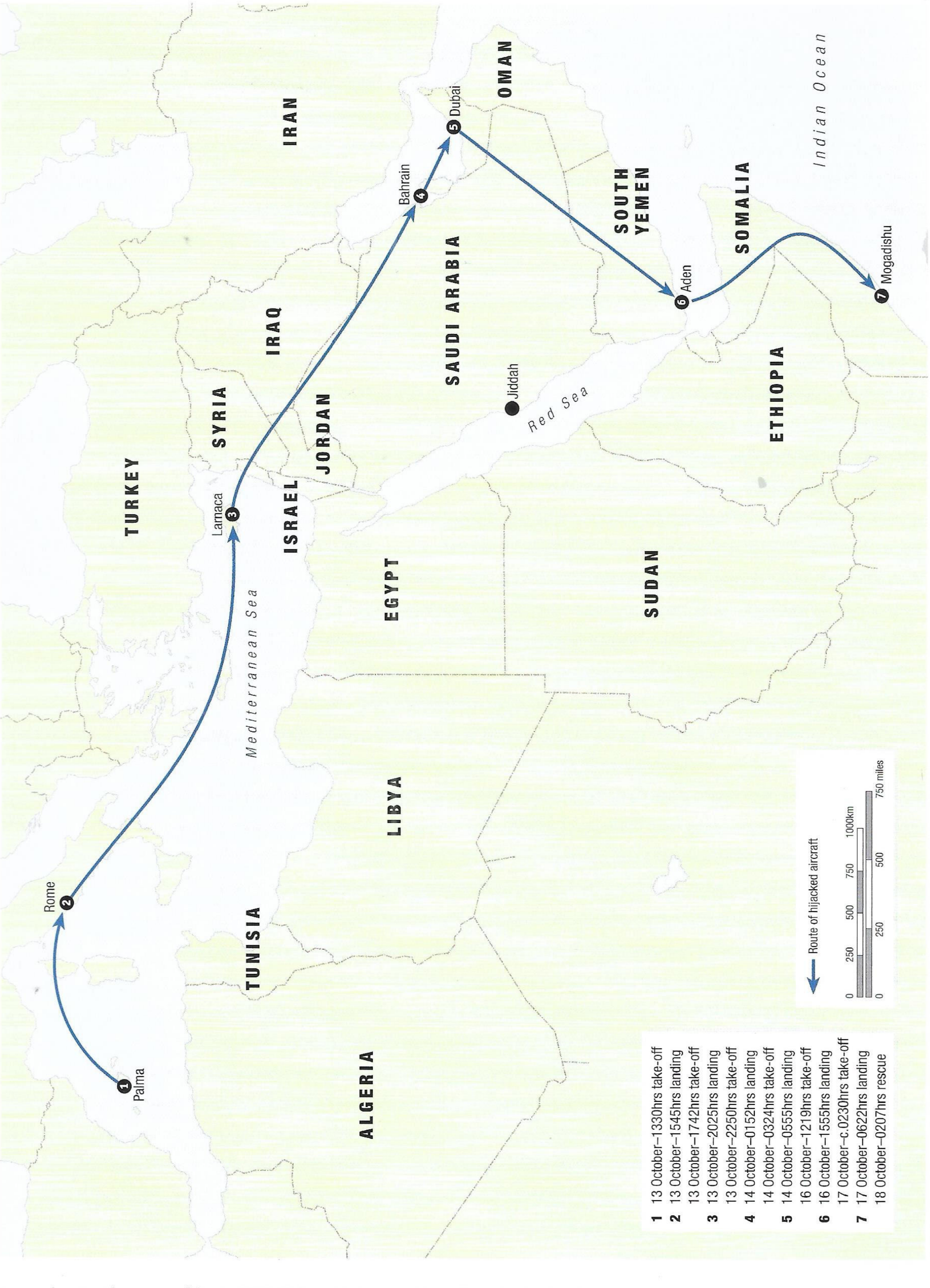
[10] J. Paul De B. Taillon, *Hijacking and Hostages: Government Responses to Terrorism*, Praeger, Westport, CT (2002) p.127

THE ENTEBBE MISSION

A major inspiration behind the Mogadishu action, although not a practical model, was the Israeli hostage-rescue mission at Entebbe in 1976. On 27 June, a two-man PFLP cell and two German revolutionaries hijacked Air France flight 139, flying between Athens and Paris (the plane had originated in Israel). Their demand was that 53 insurgents held in Israeli jails be freed. The hijacked aircraft was flown to Entebbe in Uganda, where the hijackers were joined by another four terrorists. There the hijackers released all non-Jewish and non-Israeli hostages, but threatened to kill all the remaining 105 hostages should the Israeli government not meet their demands. While the Israeli government appeared to enter into negotiations, it also put in action a high-risk military option, developed by Brigadier-General Dan Shomron. A C-130 aircraft, packed with a 100-strong force of Israeli commandos and with no permission from the Ugandan authorities, landed on Entebbe runway on 4 July. The aircraft opened its cargo doors and disgorged the assault force, who proceeded to kill all eight hostages in intense gun battles in the airport terminal buildings. One Israeli soldier – the assault force commander Yonatan Netanyahu – and two hostages also died, but the mission succeeded in successfully evacuating all the surviving hostages. It should be noted that during the operation Israeli soldiers also engaged resisting Ugandan troops, hence the political sensitivities of the Mogadishu forces landing in foreign countries.



A Scorpion tank of the United Arab Emirates armed forces patrols around LH181, as it sits on the runway at Dubai airport. All countries at which the aircraft stopped were eager to see it gone again, fearing a terrorist outrage on their own soil. (Press Association)


IRAN
OMAN
Dubai
Indian Ocean
Bahrain
SOUTH YEMEN
SOMALIA
Mogadishu
SAUDI ARABIA
Aden
IRAQ
Jiddah
Red Sea
ETHIOPIA
SYRIA
JORDAN
TURKEY
Larnaca
ISRAEL
EGYPT
SUDAN
Mediterranean Sea
LIBYA
Rome
TUNISIA
ALGERIA
Palma
1 13 October–1330hrs take-off
2 13 October–1545hrs landing
13 October–1742hrs take-off
3 13 October–2025hrs landing
13 October–2250hrs take-off
4 14 October–0152hrs landing
14 October–0324hrs take-off
5 14 October–0555hrs landing
16 October–1219hrs take-off
6 16 October–1555hrs landing
17 October–c.0230hrs take-off
7 17 October–0622hrs landing
18 October–0207hrs rescue
Route of hijacked aircraft
0 250 500 750 1000km
0 250 500 750 miles

A map showing the stages of flight of LH181 from Mallorca to Mogadishu, 13–17 October 1977 not very happy that our intelligence could not tell us who they were.'[11] Yet while at Dubai, Wegener gleaned his first piece of hard-core information about the nature of the challenge facing him and his GSG 9 team. He later explained that:

> . . . we got the first information about the terrorists. We got it from the crew. Some months ago we had worked out a code with Lufthansa personnel which would provide us with some information about the hijackers. In Dubai I got a coded message from the captain of the hijacked aircraft that there were four terrorists aboard, two male and two female.[12]

The coded system consisted of four cigars, casually dropped by Schumann from an open door during an apparent cigar break. Two of the cigars were broken in half, which together with the other two cigars indicated that there were two female, and two male hostages aboard. (Schumann had by this stage already discussed with Vietor the issue of smuggling out information, and appeared focused on helping out any future rescue mission.)

Schumann's information gave Wegener a better understanding of the tactical challenges facing his men. Further information was provided when the terrorists opened the aircraft doors to let in fresh air. As they appeared at the door, the German team took photographs. Such was vital information. In any hostage-rescue mission, one of the challenges for a special forces team is to distinguish hostages from terrorists rapidly, and having photo ID of the hijackers would help in this process enormously. Unwittingly assisting their adversaries, most of the terrorists had also donned distinctive Che Guevara T-shirts, which would be easily recognized were the hijack to end up in combat.

Another benefit of the photographs was that they revealed more about the way that the hijackers were armed, at least in terms of firearms. Barry Davies later recounted that they gathered the impression that there were at least two pistols on board. Such information provided some degree of comfort, as at least there didn't appear to be heavier, full-auto firepower available. The amount of explosives on board, however, remained a mystery.

Also during the phase at Dubai, the British SAS became more directly involved in the Lufthansa hijack. As we have already seen, even in the earlier stages of the hijack situation the German administration had been in contact with the British government. British forces had a long experience of dealing with terrorism and insurgency in places such as Palestine, Malaya and Northern Ireland. Furthermore, the British government had persuasive diplomatic ties with many countries in the Middle East, ties that would become increasingly useful to the GSG 9 force.

Once informed about the Lufthansa hijack, within 24 hours the British government had passed down orders to the SAS to bring itself up to speed with the situation. Although there was obviously no question of the SAS taking over the operation, an advisory role was possible. Therefore, on Friday 14 October SAS officers and key personnel were briefed on the hijack

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11 Discovery Channel, *Special Forces Heroes*
12 Taillon, *Hijacking and Hostages*, p.128

situation in London. The following day, two key SAS experts – Sergeant Barry Davies and Major Alastair Morrison– were dispatched to RAF Brize Norton for a flight to Germany. Prior to this occurring, however, the GSG 9 had contacted the SAS with interest in the G60 stun grenades they held in their armouries. The stun grenades were non-lethal munitions that when detonated emitted a 300,000-candlepower blast of light and 160 decibels of sound. The combined effect on anyone stood nearby was literally stunning, providing a window of confusion that a hostage-rescue team could exploit to their advantage. Given the situation that the GSG 9 forces were facing, the stun grenades had an obvious interest, and a crate of the devices was waiting at Brize Norton for the two SAS soldiers to take out to Germany.

Davies and Alastair were flown out to Bonn on an RAF C-130, arriving in the West German capital, Bonn, at 0630hrs on Saturday 15 October. There they were taken to the GSG 9 headquarters at St Augustin, to meet with the unit's second-in-command, Major Blatte (Wegener had by this time already flown on to Dubai). One notable incident that occurred while the SAS soldiers were in Germany was an impromptu demonstration of the G60 stun grenades, on the request of the GSG 9 officers. Barry Davies here takes up the story in his book *Assault on LH181*:

> I needed a space similar in size and shape to the interior of an aircraft, and found a long corridor in the cellars of the GSG 9 building. It took some persuasion to get a dozen nervous GSG 9 men to take up positions in various recessed doorways. With suspicious eyes, they watched me as I unclipped the metal box and withdrew one of the menacing black rubber cylinders. Continually assuring the GSG 9 men that I would not harm them (sometimes I have a wicked sense of humour!) I switched off the lights, pulled out the pin and tossed the grenade into the darkness amongst them. The delay is about .8 of a second, and no matter how many times you practise with stun grenades in training, when you are on the receiving end of a live one the effect is devastating. The language was pretty blue as several severely shocked GSG 9 men emerged staggering from the cellar corridor.[13]

The demonstration proved the potential value of the stun grenades, and by midday the two SAS men were heading out to the Middle East, first flying to Kuwait then transferring to a flight into Dubai, where they arrived at about 0200hrs on Sunday the 16th.

As a moment of drama, at Kuwait the two SAS men had to carry their box of stun grenades through airport security. The Lufthansa liaison officer had been diverted away from escorting the two men, who were compelled to put the box of grenades through the security X-ray machine. Puzzled by what he saw on the screen, the security guard ordered that they open the case, at which point he, in Davies's words, 'screamed like he'd found me in bed with his wife!' They were taken under armed escort to a holding room, where they were given a rudimentary interrogation. At one point a curious, or cocky, guard put his finger in the pin of a grenade and made as if to pull it, eliciting a rapid shout from Davies telling him to stop. At this point, however, the Lufthansa liaison officer appeared, and ordered the guards to release both men and grenades under the threat of terrible diplomatic penalties from the German government.

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[13] Barry Davies, *Assault on LH181*, Bloomsbury, London (1994), p.101

14 OCTOBER 1977

0600hrs Flight LH181 lands at Dubai

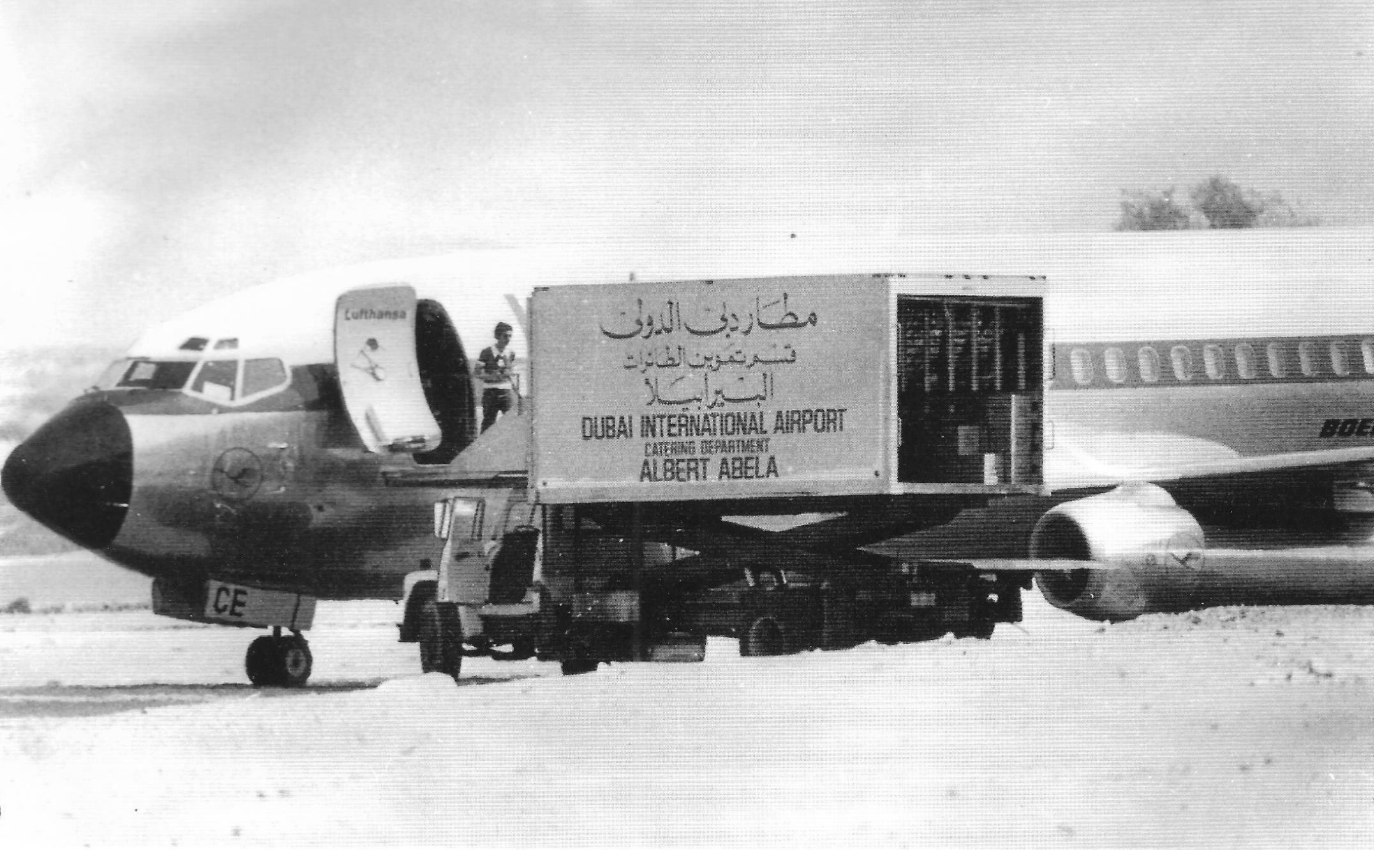
Passenger conditions

Parked a few hundred metres from the perimeter fence of Dubai airport, and surrounded by local soldiers (who kept a discreet distance), the passengers, crew and also the terrorists aboard LH181 faced potentially lethal environmental conditions from the Middle Eastern sun. The UAE authorities, based in the control tower of the airport, quickly established contact with Mahmud. One of the principal negotiators was Sheikh Mohammed, the third son of the ruler of Dubai, who maintained regular contact with the hijackers but without achieving a significant breakthrough.

Aboard the aircraft, the atmosphere had become a little calmer. Post-hijack interviews with hostages indicated that whenever Mahmud himself was present in the main cabin the atmosphere became more tense and dangerous, but while in Dubai Mahmud spent much of his time up in the cockpit talking on the radio with the Dubai authorities. Yet still conditions were appalling. Toilet breaks were few – the first official break came a total of 17 hours after the hijacking began, and many passengers had been forced to wet themselves. Water was in extremely limited supply, improved only

Lufthansa
CE

Two stewardesses stand as prisoners in the doorway of LH181. The stewardesses went through a harrowing ordeal, including injury from grenades, physical abuse (particularly from Mahmud) and witnessing the death of their captain. (Press Association)



when some Pakistani labourers were permitted to take some bottles of mineral water up to the aircraft. A catering truck was also brought up, and everyone aboard had their first meal in about 24 hours. Incidentally, the terrorists had ordered the passengers to draw all the blinds in the cabin, meaning that until the catering food boxes arrived, bearing the words 'Airport Dubai', the hostages had no idea where they were in the world.

Birgit Röhll, one of the hostages aboard the plane, remembers the fear generated by the hijackers: 'One woman [terrorist] was called Suhaila; we called her "the fat woman", and she was full of hate. Mahmud, the head of the hijackers, he was terrible. He was so full of hate and so nervous always. If you don't obey, you will be shot.'[14] Tensions increased whenever Mahmud made his presence felt in the passenger cabin. Sometimes he would go through passenger passports, and then drag out individuals to interrogate them about their connections to Israel and the Jewish religion. At one point, he even delivered a one-hour tirade over the aircraft's tannoy system, lecturing the passengers on Palestinian history and politics. He grew so incensed with his theme that he accidentally discharged his weapon, putting a bullet into the co-pilot's chair.

For Schumann, the biggest issue was keeping down the temperature in the cabin, which already stood at 30°C (86°F). On landing he informed Mahmud about need for fuel to keep the air conditioning and light running inside the aircraft. During the evening, fuel did indeed run out, and the stand-by battery

The hijackers and hostages of the *Landshut* were aboard the aircraft for more than five days, and food was quickly expended. Here catering supplies are provided at Dubai airport; the identifying marks on the food packages were the only things that told the passengers where they were, as all cabin blinds had to remain closed. (Press Association)

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[14] Discovery Channel, *Special Forces Heroes*

16 OCTOBER 1977

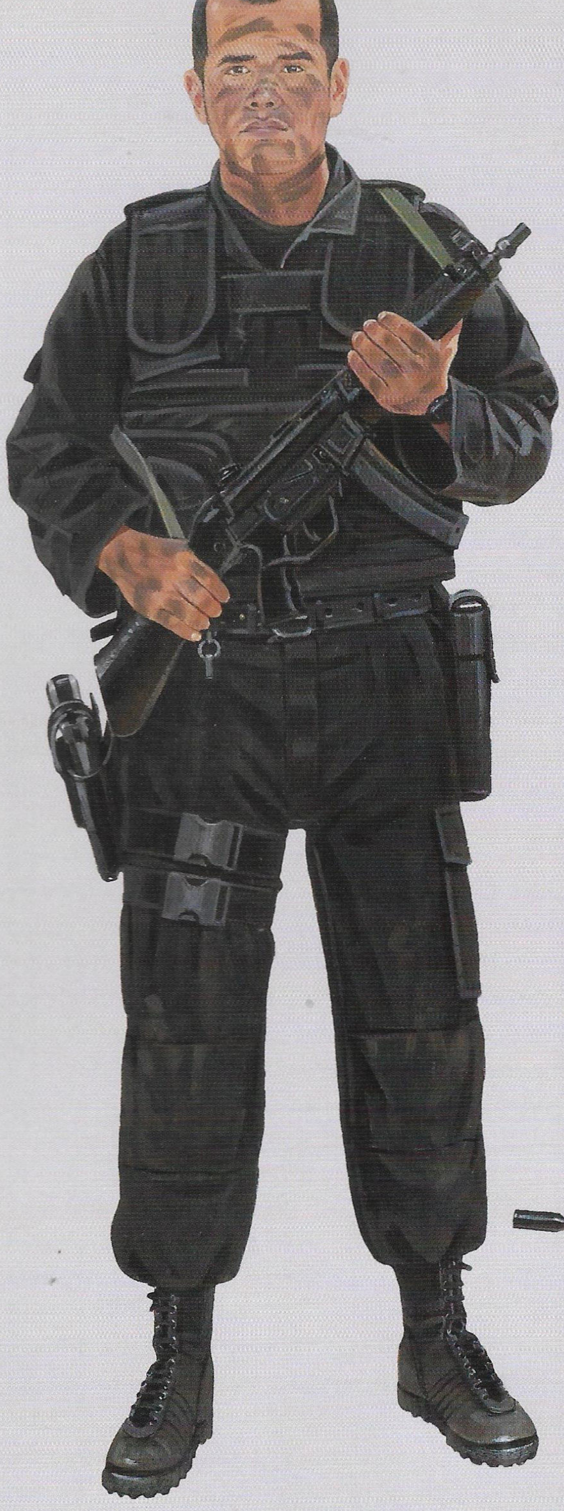
1219hrs Flight LH181 takes off from Dubai

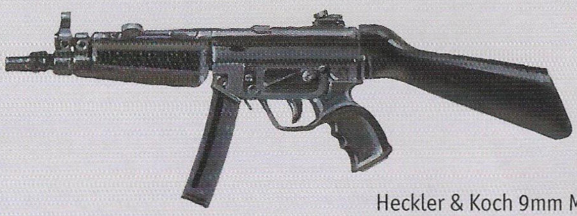
was switched on to give the aircraft another half an hour of light, although the heat inside the plane was starting to climb inexorably. In a short space of time, the temperature had reached 49°C (120°F), and people began to pass out, vomit or exhibit signs of panic. Mahmud ordered more fuel to be brought up, but an initial refuelling was incorrectly performed by ground crew. (The fuel was pumped into the right fuel tank only, whereas the aircraft took its generator power from the left fuel tank. Nor was there the electricity available to pump the fuel from the right tank into the left tank.) Later in the evening, a solution was found. Sheikh Mohammed, in consultation with two Lufthansa captains who were now acting as advisers in the control tower, ordered the supply of an auxiliary power unit to the aircraft. The unit, contained in a truck, was driven over to LH181 by the two captains plus a Lufthansa engineer and a local man. When they were just a short distance from the aircraft, Mahmud ordered them to stop to identify themselves. After some verbal exchanges, Mahmud identified some of the men as Germans and flew into a rage, particularly with Schumann. He then raced back to the open cockpit door, and opened fire at the men, emptying his pistol magazine. Thankfully, no one was injured or killed, but the four men on the ground were forced to flee from the scene.

In a fraught atmosphere, Schumann and Vietor discussed what to do now, as the aircraft still had no power. Eventually, it was agreed that Vietor would be lowered to the ground, where he would individually perform the difficult job of connecting up the auxiliary power unit. This he managed, but there still wasn't enough power in the back-up battery to make a connection with the ground unit. Vietor was hauled back on board to explain the situation, which Mahmud seemed to accept with an air of defeatism. He allowed the pilots to communicate with the control tower using Morse code, delivered via torches, and just before sunrise a ground team finally appeared, who supplied another back-up battery. LH181 now had light and cool air. Conditions were still horrible for the passengers, especially once the toilets became blocked. But at least, for the moment, they were alive.

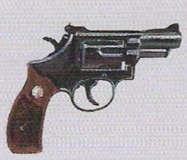
Training for action

While the drama was playing itself out around the aircraft, a different sort of activity was developing in terms of a rescue plan. One of the biggest problems for Wegener was the simple fact that, despite Wischnewski's best efforts, the Dubai authorities would not permit a large foreign combat team to conduct a hostage-rescue mission on their soil. Instead, Sheikh Mohammed insisted that the mission be conducted by local soldiers, typically paras and members of the local palace guard. These soldiers were reasonable fighters, but had no training in storming an aircraft. The European men also needed some form of kit if they were going to undertake an assault. Using the large wads of cash they had brought with them, the men purchased handguns, sub-machine guns and shotguns (they sawed the ends off the shotgun barrels to make them more compact for an assault). They also set about making assault ladders, by cutting up regular maintenance ladders and then spraying them black to remove any trace of glinting metal.

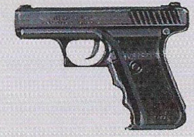




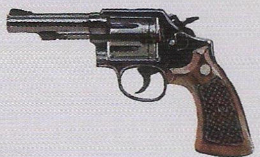
Heckler & Koch 9mm MP5



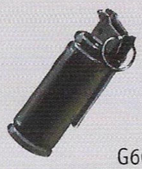
Smith & Wesson .38 Special revolver



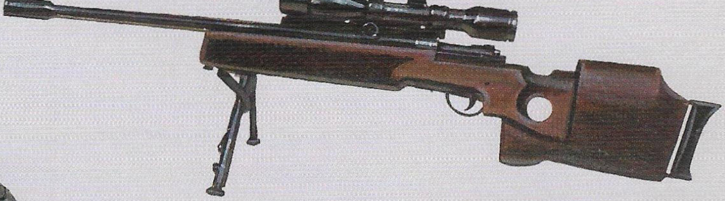
Heckler & Koch 9mm P7 automatic handgun



Smith & Wesson .357
revolver Model 19



G60 stun grenade



Mauser 7.62mm SP66 sniper rifle

The figure here represents a typical GSG 9 officer of the Mogadishu raid, and some of the weapons used by the team during the action. The officer himself dresses lightly. He wears rubber-soled combat boots, battledress trousers and shirt, and a short bullet-proof jacket, of the same type often worn by the SAS during the 1970s and 80s. He is carrying a 9mm Heckler & Koch MP5 sub-machine gun, although many of the raiding team at Mogadishu carried handguns instead. No helmet was worn, and the face was blacked out using camouflage paint.

In an attempt to remedy the training situation Wegener, two other GSG 9 operatives and the two SAS men set about delivering a rapid instruction course in aircraft assault techniques to three members of the Dubai Defence Force (DDF) and two members of the Palace Guard. For this purpose they used a Gulf Air 737 jet that had been personally requisitioned by Sheikh Mohammed and set up in a hangar within the airport. About 20 men in total were involved in the training. The most important focus of the activity was how to approach LH181 unseen, enter it with maximum speed and clear the seating row by row. Pooling their knowledge, the GSG 9 operatives and SAS soldiers came up with a plan based around the following elements. (The actual attack plan is described in greater detail later in the book.) First, the team would approach the aircraft silently from the rear, taking advantage of the Boeing 737's blind spots in that direction. Once underneath the aircraft, the unit would then place specially designed assault ladders against the fuselage and deploy two-man teams against the port and starboard emergency exits, which are easily opened from the outside. Other teams would make the same preparations against the front and rear main passenger doors, to effect entry as quickly as possible if the first teams required back-up. The actual attack would begin with a distraction of stun grenades (aided by the sudden disconnection of the auxiliary power unit), followed by rapid entry of the assault teams. The starboard team would then clear the interior of the aircraft from the centre to the rear toilet area, while the port team would move forward towards the cockpit. Such a plan was easy in description, but it required stealthy movement, strong nerves and then explosive, high-tempo action if it was to be a success. Davies himself was confident: 'I was very pleased with the way the training had gone, and everybody really gelled together considering that we were just a very small party. And I was very confident that we could have pulled it off that night. And the Defence Minister sanctioned our action that evening and we were all quite jubilant.'[15]

Far away from Dubai, the main body of GSG 9 fighters were having a frustrating time of things. The media had revealed that a GSG 9 team was in Cyprus (in fact they were in Ankara, Turkey, by the time this report was leaked). The news naturally alarmed the hijackers, who could listen to the radio aboard the aircraft. They demanded that the police unit was immediately returned to Germany, and the German government appeared to comply. Yet although the public impression was that GSG 9 had returned home, such was a fabrication created through a government alliance with local media outlets. In actual fact, the Boeing 707 containing the officers actually flew on to Crete, still a long way from the action but better placed to transfer quickly to the Middle East.

While all this activity was under way, however, negotiations between the control tower and the hijacked aircraft were reaching a dead end. Sheikh Mohammed once again requested that Mahmud release all the women, children and sick people on board, at the very least. Mahmud replied: 'We thank all the representatives of the government of the United Arab Emirates for their cooperation. We deeply regret that we must reject your request. We have no instructions from our headquarters to comply with them. We've tried to contact our headquarters. But I haven't heard from them.' Sheikh Mohammed also acknowledged that he had been unable to raise anyone at the PFLP headquarters, and had no power to release prisoners from German or Turkish prisons. Thus the negotiations came to an end. Yet this was not the moment for launching the assault against LH181. Responding to the hijackers' threats that they would execute hostages, the Dubai authorities had approved refuelling of the aircraft (although the amount of fuel on board was very small) and at 1219hrs LH181 took off for its next destination.

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[15] Discovery Channel, *Special Forces Heroes*

Aden

Mahmud's immediate destination for the next leg of LH181's traumatic flight was Oman, a short flight of only 400km (250 miles). Such was well within the fuel reserves of the aircraft. Yet as the aircraft approached the airbase at the island of Masirah, the airport authorities issued the following declaration: 'You are refused landing permission. The airport is blocked.' The Omanis were unmovable on this issue, despite Mahmud's threats, and Schumann had no choice but to keep his aircraft in flight. He was then given his next destination: Aden. This choice caused both Schumann and Vietor extreme anxiety, as the extra distance would mean that the aircraft would be practically running on empty by the time they arrived. There was no margin for error.

air BP
Lufthan

Fuel became the critical resource for the hijacked aircraft as it crossed from southern Europe to East Africa. Here the *Landshut* is refuelled by a tanker at Dubai airport, before its next journey to Aden. (Press Association)

During the flight, the hijackers seemed to galvanize themselves with the new defensive preparations. Some of the passengers were tied up, while according to many reports explosive charges were fitted to the cabin walls of the aircraft and fuses put in place. (After the hostage-rescue mission, GSG 9 operatives discovered 2kg/4.4lb of explosive placed around the doors of the aircraft.) Navigating by way of the coastline, Schumann eventually piloted the aircraft to Aden, and when he entered Yemeni airspace he established contact with the control tower. As in the case of Oman, however, the airport authorities bluntly refused permission for the aircraft to land, and stated that the runway had been blocked to prevent them from doing so.

Here was one of the most dangerous moments of the hijacking so far. At the point the aircraft made contact with the airport at Aden, LH181 had only enough fuel for another 25 minutes of flight. This was nowhere near enough to reach the nearest airport to Aden, at Djibouti. In short, it was either Aden or nowhere.

Defying the protestations of the Yemeni authorities, the two aviators took the Boeing 737 down to Aden and made a low-level pass at an altitude of 914m (3,000ft) to check out the situation on the ground. The main runways were indeed blocked by vehicles, including armoured cars, and provided no opportunity to put the aircraft down. Running parallel to the runway, however, were two other rough landing strips. These were not blocked, but the pilot had no information about the condition of the landing surface (the airstrips were not even marked on the airport maps), and there was the very real possibility that the aircraft's landing gear would simply bury itself into the soft surface and tip the aircraft over. Yet the strips appeared to present the best option for landing, so Schumann informed the chief stewardess, Piegler, to make the passengers ready for a crash landing.

The aircraft cabin now turned into a hive of activity. Passengers began adopting the emergency landing posture. The aircraft circled back for the landing approach and finally touched down in a spray of sand and stone. As a landing, touchdown was certainly uncomfortable, but thankfully the aircraft kept on its course after a couple of bounces and eventually came to a steady halt. The pilots had initiated all the fire extinguishers to the engines, but thankfully there was no fire. They were down safely once again. It was 1555hrs on 16 October.

16 OCTOBER
1977

1555hrs
Flight LH181
lands at Aden

Both the hijackers and the pilots, however, now had to contend with the response from the Yemeni military. The aircraft was surrounded with the armed soldiers and armoured cars, and for about half an hour there was nothing but silence from the control tower, despite the attempts by Schumann and Mahmud to make contact with the authorities. Eventually someone spoke with Mahmud via a loudhailer, but simply gave instructions that the aircraft would be refuelled and had to take off again. Schumann vigorously protested, knowing that the rough landing they had just undertaken could have damaged the landing gear and might be unsafe for take-off. A cursory inspection and OK from a group of local engineers failed to provide reassurance.

On this occasion, Mahmud's training in aeronautical engineering worked in Schumann's favour. He convinced Mahmud to give him permission to

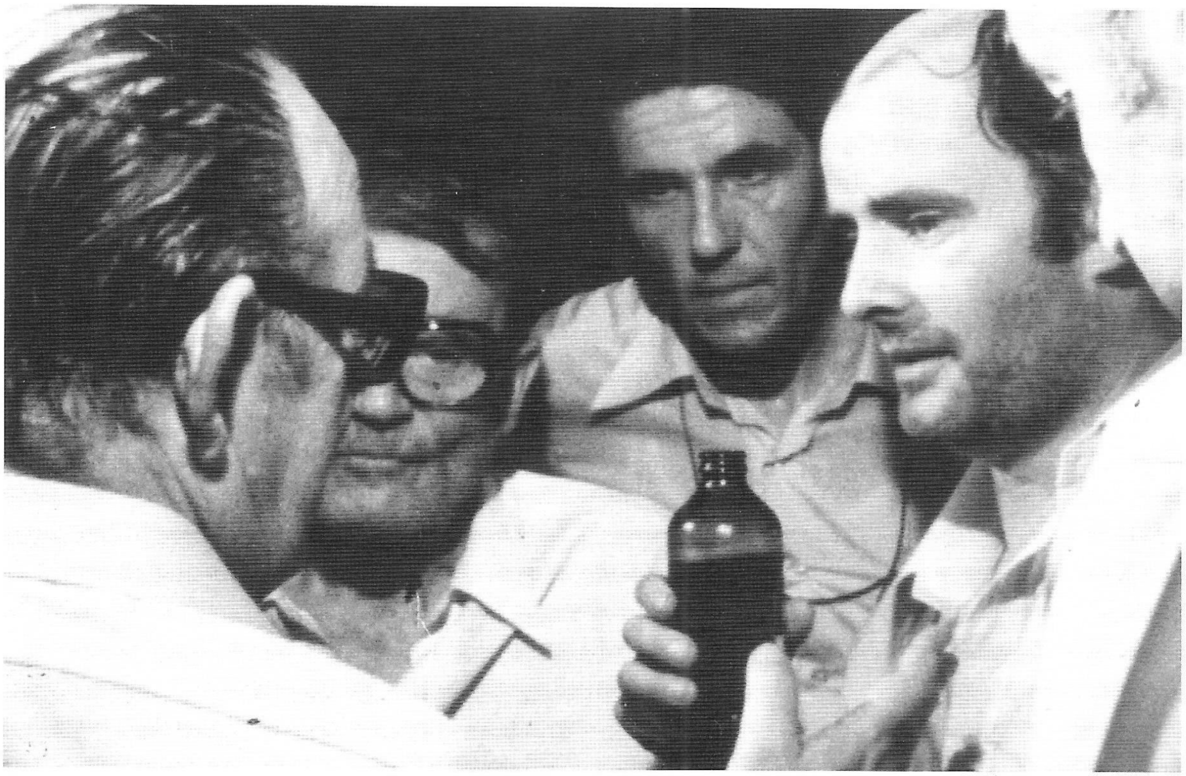
Lufthansa
Luft
Landshut
CE

Captain Jürgen Schumann sits on the floor of his aircraft in Dubai, attempting to placate an increasingly angry Captain Mahmud. Born in 1940, Schumann went on to a career with the German Air Force as an F-104 Starfighter pilot before joining Lufthansa. (Press Association)

climb down to inspect the undercarriage himself. Schumann climbed down and proceeded to check the aircraft over, looking out for any signs of damage. Yet while he was doing so, he also decided to set off to get in contact with the Yemeni authorities, and ask for their assistance with the plane. He walked across the open ground to the airport's control tower, where he told the authorities what was happening to the aircraft. For Mahmud and Vietor, it appeared that Captain Schumann had possibly escaped.

Mahmud now saw red. He radioed the Aden control tower furiously, demanding that the pilot return to the aircraft or he would set off the explosive charges. Wegener later said that 'The authorities there did not want to interfere. They forced him to go back.' Hence after a period of time Schumann once again reappeared, and boarded the aircraft to face what Mahmud described as a 'revolutionary court'. Mahmud started screaming at the pilot, accusing him of passing information to the Yemeni authorities. Schumann, whose very self-composure infuriated Mahmud, knelt on the floor of the economy cabin, unable to even begin his explanation. Then, as he once again attempted to begin his account of events, Mahmud slapped him hard across the face, and then shot him once in the head. Schumann was killed instantly, his body slumping in front of the passengers on the aircraft.

It was a uniquely horrifying moment during the hijacking, and one that would confirm that the threats made against the passengers were not idle. Passenger Beate Keller remembered:



Hans-Jürgen Wischnewski (left) talks to exhausted co-pilot Jürgen Vietor after LH181's liberation. Vietor had the unenviable task of taking over the aircraft on his own after the killing of Captain Schumann. (Press Association)

> We were all afraid to cry because we did not want to give Mahmud cause to grab or shoot someone else. It was deathly quiet in the aircraft, it was so terrible. And the worse thing was, actually, that the 'fat woman', we called her the 'fat woman', was eating an apple during this. That was really awful.[16]

Flight to Mogadishu

With Schumann dead, Vietor was now the only individual capable of flying the *Landshut*, a significant burden for a co-pilot. In Dubai, meanwhile, Wischnewski was informed about Schumann's murder, and immediately went to tell Wegener, his associates and the two SAS men. Barry Davies remembers Wischnewski saying, 'Gentlemen, I am sorry to mess you around, but there has been a major change of events. The pilot, Jürgen Schumann, it has been shot dead in Aden. It is now our intention, and the intention of the German government, to follow flight LH181 wherever it may go and release the passengers'.[17] The GSG 9-led team now began to discuss hostage-rescue options at Aden itself, but events would soon change even those plans.

On board LH181, the passengers were having a truly dreadful experience. The hijackers' levels of aggression and frustration seemed to increase. At one point a mentally unsettled old man stood up and began to shout out loud,

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16 Discovery Channel, *Special Forces Heroes*
17 Davies, *Assault on LH181*, p.123

and was punched hard in the chest to silence him. The physical conditions on the aircraft were also deteriorating fast. Lights and air conditioning failed as the aircraft expended its last drop of fuel, causing the onboard temperature once again to climb to suffocating levels. Schumann's body still lay on the cabin floor in a pool of blood, and over time the body started to release a sickening smell, combining with the stench from the blocked toilets. The Yemeni authorities prohibited throwing the body out of the plane, so instead the corpse was unceremoniously dragged into the rear of the aircraft and locked in a storage compartment.

It became clear to both Mahmud and Vietor that the Yemenis wanted them gone; the nature of the language coming from the control tower raised the distinct possibility that surrounding military units might open fire if the plane did not eventually leave. Vietor managed to secure some aviation fuel for the next, as yet unknown, leg of the journey, but he had deep concerns about the condition of the aircraft following its rough landing. The true test of its airworthiness came in the early hours of 16 October. Faced with increasingly irate demands from the Yemeni authorities, Vietor started the engines and forced the reluctant aircraft out of the sand and on to the end of the runway. Requests for weather information were denied, withheld until the aircraft was in flight. In a bizarre situation, Mahmud had to read out the pre-flight checks for Vietor, a moment of horrible co-operation considering what Mahmud had recently done.

The press are given an update on the hijacking by German Minister of State Hans-Jürgen Wischnewski (left) and Werner Maihofer, the Federal Minister of the Interior. The special forces men were particularly impressed by the steel and intelligence of Wischnewski during negotiations. (Press Association)

17 OCTOBER 1977

0622hrs Flight LH181 lands at Mogadishu

At last, Vietor applied take-off power to his two engines, fearful that the sand choking the air intakes would cause engine failure or even explosions. With poor acceleration, LH181 gathered speed down the makeshift runway and eventually took to the air with little distance to spare before the strip came to an end. Once they were airborne, Mahmud informed Vietor of the next destination – Mogadishu in Somalia.

The flight to Mogadishu was relatively uneventful, although it was a demanding one for Vietor, coping with everything from flying the aircraft to navigation. Having tracked down the Somali coastline, the aircraft eventually picked up a beacon at Mogadishu. Vietor requested permission to land. In now-familiar style, permission was denied, but unlike at Aden this denial was not backed up by any obstruction of the runway. Vietor guided the aircraft in for landing, once again helped by Mahmud, who ran through the pre-landing check. After circling the runway once, Vietor brought the aircraft in for a perfect landing at 0622hrs on 17 October.

State of play

Mogadishu was a fitting location for the climax of the LH181 saga. Since 1969 the country had been under the rule of President Mohammed Siad Barre, who had established a socialist dictatorship over the war-torn country. Somalia, although experiencing a degree of stability it had not known for decades, was still in a precarious position. Like many African nations, it was a pawn in the superpower game of the Cold War, heavily sponsored by the Soviet Union in terms of weaponry and military assistance. This alliance had in turn caused much of the aid provided by the United States to dry up, feeding the terrible cycles of poverty and famine that gripped the country. For the European security forces who would eventually be deployed to Mogadishu, the country was a mixed blessing. On the one hand, its turbulent social structure and international alliances injected some initial uncertainty into dealings with the Somali state. Yet, conversely, Somalia's very need for assistance and aid would provide a negotiating tool for the German government. When told of the aircraft's landing in Mogadishu, Wischnewski reportedly said, 'I think we could manage something there.'

Back on the tarmac, it took a long time before Mahmud established firm contact with the Somali authorities. Soldiers arrived on the scene outside the aircraft, and surrounded it in a rather casual fashion. Inside LH181, a distinctive moment in the psychology of the hijack occurred when Mahmud offered Vietor his freedom, in gratitude for his Herculean efforts of flying the plane single-handedly to Mogadishu. Vietor considered the offer, but then chose to remain on board the aircraft with the cabin crew and passengers.

Finally, Mahmud eventually established contact with representatives from the German embassy in Somalia. The first person he spoke to was the German Chargé d'Affaires, Michael Libal. Mahmud reiterated his original demands for the prisoners' release. When Libal replied that he was unable to negotiate without further instructions from his government, Mahmud's patience seemed to dissolve. He forcibly asserted an end to all negotiations, claiming that he would blow up the aircraft and everyone in it by 1500hrs

The body of Captain Jürgen Schumann is removed from the tarmac of Mogadishu Airport, following his execution in Aden. Incredibly, Schumann was the only hostage fatality incurred during the entire hijack and hostage-rescue mission. (Press Association)

if his demands were not met. The pressure on Libal was increased when Gaby Dillmann, the stewardess, came on to the radio and pleaded with him to resolve the situation quickly. She described the conditions on board, stating that soon people would be dying from heat exhaustion in the confines of the aircraft.

The final degradation of Schumann's body was also about to take place. The smell inside the aircraft was reaching intolerable levels, and eventually the corpse was casually dropped from the aircraft on to the tarmac below. It was a jolting action. For the Somalis, a Muslim nation, the dumping of a Christian body on their soil galvanized their desire to see a resolution to this situation. Yet now the wheels were truly beginning to turn against the hijackers, as GSG 9 began serious preparations for their first major operation.

PLAN

Shortly after LH181 landed in Mogadishu, the Boeing 707 containing Wischnewski, the GSG 9 command team, the SAS soldiers and other key individuals took off from Jeddah in Saudi Arabia and headed for the Somali capital. (They had flown to Jeddah from Dubai, having been refused permission to land at Aden by the Yemeni authorities.) Chancellor Schmidt was already in negotiation with Barre, the ultimate German goal being for the Somali president to allow German forces on to his soil to conduct a hostage-rescue mission. The flight had a certain tension to it. The flightpath actually took the Boeing through East African war zones, posing the threat of being shot down by surface-to-air missiles or Soviet-built fighters. Thankfully the flight itself was uneventful, and the team was given permission to land at Mogadishu.

The challenge for the pilot of the Boeing was that LH181 was still on the runway. There was just enough distance, however, for a skilful pilot to put the aircraft down then pull it up before he reached the hijacked airliner. Barry Davies here recounts the final moment of landing:

> As the co-pilot levelled the 707 for its final approach, we were only a few feet above the ground. The flat roofs of the airport buildings flashed underneath as, with fantastic skill that bordered upon genius, the pilot managed to touch the aircraft down at the very edge of the runway. Weird screeching noises and smoke came from the undercarriage as the brakes were applied, bringing the giant aircraft rapidly to a halt. In the final seconds the pilot managed to turn our plane around and head back away from the hijacked aircraft. On board the 707 we all clapped.[18]

Once the aircraft was down, the German diplomatic team immediately went into negotiations with the Somali authorities. Davies noted, however, that all the weapons on board the aircraft were hidden in case they be confiscated

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[18] **18** Davies, *Assault on LH181*, p.128

by the local customs officials. (The weapons were all placed inside in a catering trolley.) While the high-level diplomacy played itself out, negotiations were still ongoing with the hijackers on the aircraft. Principal figures in the negotiation team were the Somali chief of police, General Abdullah, and a German psychologist, Wolfgang Salewski.

The hijacked LH181 sits on the runway during its stop at Dubai. The time it spent at this airport presented the best opportunity for launching a hostage-rescue mission prior to its arrival at Mogadishu. (Press Association)

The negotiations were not going well. Mahmud was becoming increasingly angry and irrational, his already unstable psychology unsettled by a lack of sleep. The Somali authorities requested that the terrorists release all of the women and children on board the aircraft, but this now-familiar request was again denied. Nevertheless, food and water were supplied to the aircraft in an attempt to make all aboard more comfortable.

Wischnewski became a focal point for the negotiations once again. Based on the advice of the police psychologist, Wischnewski played for time as much as possible, trying to give the hijackers glimmers of hope that would lead them to extend deadlines and refrain from killing hostages. Yet violence appeared to be imminent.

Mahmud's mental state seemed to deteriorate quickly throughout the 17th. His threats were persistent and aggressive, and at around 1430hrs he appeared to make preparations to fulfil his deadline of 1500hrs. Taking all the alcohol and flammable liquids he could find on the aircraft, he poured them over the heads of the passengers and on their seating, seemingly intent on incinerating the aircraft and all its occupants.

It was during these intense moments that an unusually intense emotional drama occurred. The co-pilot on the Boeing 707 that had flown Wegener,

A TV camera focuses on LH181 as it sits on the runway at Dubai. The hijacking of LH181 generated huge international media interest. Such coverage was central to the terrorist plan, as it could be used to apply public pressure upon the German government. (Press Association)

Wischnewski and others into Mogadishu was Rüdiger von Lutzau. He happened to be the fiancé of Gaby Dillmann, one of the stewardesses aboard the aircraft. Later in the process of negotiations, von Lutzau found himself stood near the radio receiving messages from LH181. As he was listening, Dillmann's voice came over the air waves – Mahmud had put her on in an attempt to oil the wheels of the negotiations. In heart-rending fashion, she implored the German government to act:

> We know this is the end, and that we shall all die. Many of us are too young to die. Still, it is better to die than live in a world where human lives count for so little. I hope it will be quick. What is more important – to keep nine people in jail or save the lives of ninety? Tell my family it wasn't so bad, and please tell my boyfriend that I loved him very much. I don't know what kind of people we have in our government – I only hope they can live with this on their consciences.[19]

17 OCTOBER 1977

c. 0630hrs GSG 9 command team and German negotiators take off from Jeddah

It was imperative that Wischnewski gain a deadline extension. The GSG 9 assault team had not yet arrived, and night-time would also provide the best conditions for a stealthy approach to the aircraft. Yet nightfall was about four hours beyond Mahmud's deadline. Wischnewski persisted, however, and the combined efforts of the negotiation were eventually rewarded with a half-hour deadline extension. During this time the aircraft was moved slightly, taking up position on the apron that ran parallel to the main runway. Then Wischnewski adopted a high-risk strategy by telling the hijackers what they wanted to hear. He assured them that all the prisoners in Germany would be released in accordance with their demands. What he now requested was time enough to fly the released prisoners the 7,000km (4,350 miles) from Germany to Somalia. On the basis of this request, Mahmud now extended his deadline to 0130hrs the next day, promising that he would go through with the destruction of the plane and passengers were the prisoners not in Mogadishu by that time.

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[19] Quoted in Davies, *Assault on LH181*, p.136

Wischnewski had bought some space. Now he was also negotiating hard with President Barre to allow German assault forces to conduct a hostage-rescue mission at Mogadishu Airport. The intricacies of any deal struck that day are not available for scrutiny. Initially it appears that Barre wanted Somali troops to conduct the operation, under GSG 9 leadership. At the far end of the airport, a good distance away from the *Landshut*, was a hangar containing a Boeing 707. Wegener and his GSG 9 associates went over to the hangar with a group of Somali troops, to evaluate whether they were capable of performing the mission. The results were not promising, and it was clear that only the use of the highly trained European troops offered the possibility of saving the lives of the hostages. Such was especially important now, as it had become clear that a non-violent resolution to the hijacking was extremely unlikely.

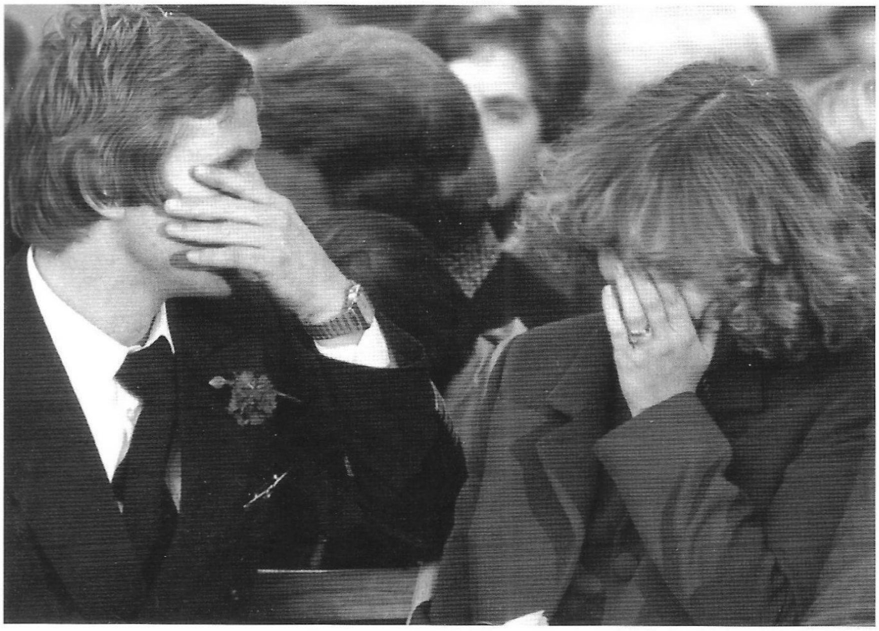
Eventually, Wischnewski achieved the result he wanted (aided by numerous phone calls from Chancellor Schmidt), and President Barre finally gave his consent for GSG 9 to conduct the rescue mission, with Somali forces acting in a supporting role.

It became a priority to get the full GSG 9 assault team from Crete out to Mogadishu. On the morning of the 16th, they had taken off aboard a Boeing 727 and headed out towards the Middle East, at this point without permission to land at Mogadishu. Even without this authorization, it was imperative that they make up time as quickly as possible, having an eight-hour flight ahead of them and a deteriorating situation aboard flight LH181.

The aircraft containing the GSG 9 team eventually arrived over Somali airspace around 1900hrs on the 17th. Permission for the aircraft to land had by now already been received, and in fact the Somali Air Force provided some

17 OCTOBER 1977

1930hrs Main GSG 9 force arrives in Somalia



Gaby Dillmann and her fiancé Rüdiger von Lutzau, at the funeral of Jürgen Schumann. Von Luftzau was present in the control tower at Mogadishu during the hijack, and was able to hear Dillmann's voice when she made a heartfelt broadcast over the radio. (Press Association)

Hans-Jürgen Wischnewski (left), the West German Secretary of State, and GSG 9 commander Ulrich Wegener, here seen after the hostage-rescue mission. Wischnewski was critical in securing the diplomatic permission for Wegener to use his men in Somalia. (Press Association)

assistance in masking the arrival of the airliner by taking off and landing fighter jets prior to its landing. Nevertheless, Mahmud's suspicions were aroused slightly by the arrival of a German airliner, but he was assured that this contained nothing more than a diplomatic mission from Germany to help with the negotiations. In fact, the operation was nearly jeopardized from the outset. An Israeli journalist heard some of the radio communications between the control tower at Mogadishu and the incoming GSG 9 aircraft. In a moment of reckless indiscretion, the journalist then reported that the Germans were sending in a hostage-rescue team, and this story was sent out to Agence France-Presse and Reuters. Thankfully, the report never worked its way out to the hijackers aboard the aircraft, otherwise the results could have been catastrophic. Having landed under the same precarious conditions as Wegener's aircraft, the other GSG 9 aircraft then taxied to the north end of Mogadishu Airport, just in front of the Somali Air Force building.

Initial reconnaissance

Even before the arrival of his team, Wegener was beginning to formulate a plan for the storming and retaking of the *Landshut*. One of his first priorities was to get familiar with the layout of the airport. The hijacked airliner was set about three-quarters of the way along the airport's main runway, at the southern end (the runway was aligned along a north–south axis. To the east of the runway was a section of desolate ground, consisting mainly of sand dunes, which was bordered by the Indian Ocean. At the north-eastern end of the airport stood the Somali Air Force building, in front of which was a large hangar and area of hard-standing, which now held the aircraft that had brought in the GSG 9 team. Wegener quickly earmarked this area as a rehearsal centre for the German officers. Across the other side of the runway were the hard-standing areas for aircraft arrivals. On this side of the airport there were three main groups of buildings. In the centre was the control tower and the arrival/departure buildings, and these were flanked on either side by aircraft hangars. Behind these was the perimeter fence for the airport, which included a road that ran out to Mogadishu city. The airport had two main access points, the first being the passenger entrance near the main airport buildings, and the second being a commercial access road beginning at the north-western corner of the airport.

In terms of tactical challenges, the greatest problem facing Wegener as he travelled around the airport was that of making an undetected approach to the hijacked airliner. In the position it stood, LH181 was surrounded by little more than flat ground; there was no cover that could be used to make a hidden approach. In essence, Wegener had to find an exposed approach route that would nonetheless enable an entire team of men to close up to the aircraft unseen, all while wearing assault gear and carrying assault ladders and weapons.

To complete his reconnaissance, at one point Wegener crept close to the *Landshut*, taking in everything he could about the condition of the aircraft and any obstacles surrounding it. Hostage-rescue missions require swift and extremely confident manoeuvres, and Wegener wanted no nasty last-minute surprises that might affect the tempo of the operation. Wegener later said: 'Getting close to the plane wasn't any problem. All the shades were down, the blackout whatsits, the plane was OK, the air-conditioning running inside. And everything was very quiet.'[20]

Because of the use of the airport as an air force base, as well as its national importance there was a naturally heavy military presence. The local soldiers could be rather jumpy. According to Barry Davies, when he drove to the airport in a jeep driven by a Somali general, the general himself ducked down behind the dashboard to protect himself when approaching an AK47-wielding sentry, preferring to shout for permission to pass through the checkpoint rather than rely on visual authority. While their tactical skills were questionable, the Somali soldiers did add the potential to multiply force when needed. One immediate and important service they performed was to seal off the airport to the outside world, giving GSG 9 a controlled space in which to operate.

While it was straightforward to conduct individual reconnaissance of the area surrounding the aircraft, what now became critical was to glean some information about what was occurring within the aircraft. There were a huge number of unknowns about the hijack situation. What was the level of expertise of the terrorists? Had they planted any booby traps around access points? What were their positions aboard the aircraft? In what sort of condition were the passengers, and would they obscure fields of fire once the GSG 9 soldiers had entered the aircraft? Once the main GSG 9 team had arrived, Wegener set about attempting to find some of the answers.

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[20] Aust, *Baader-Meinhof*, p.404

The GSG 9 team

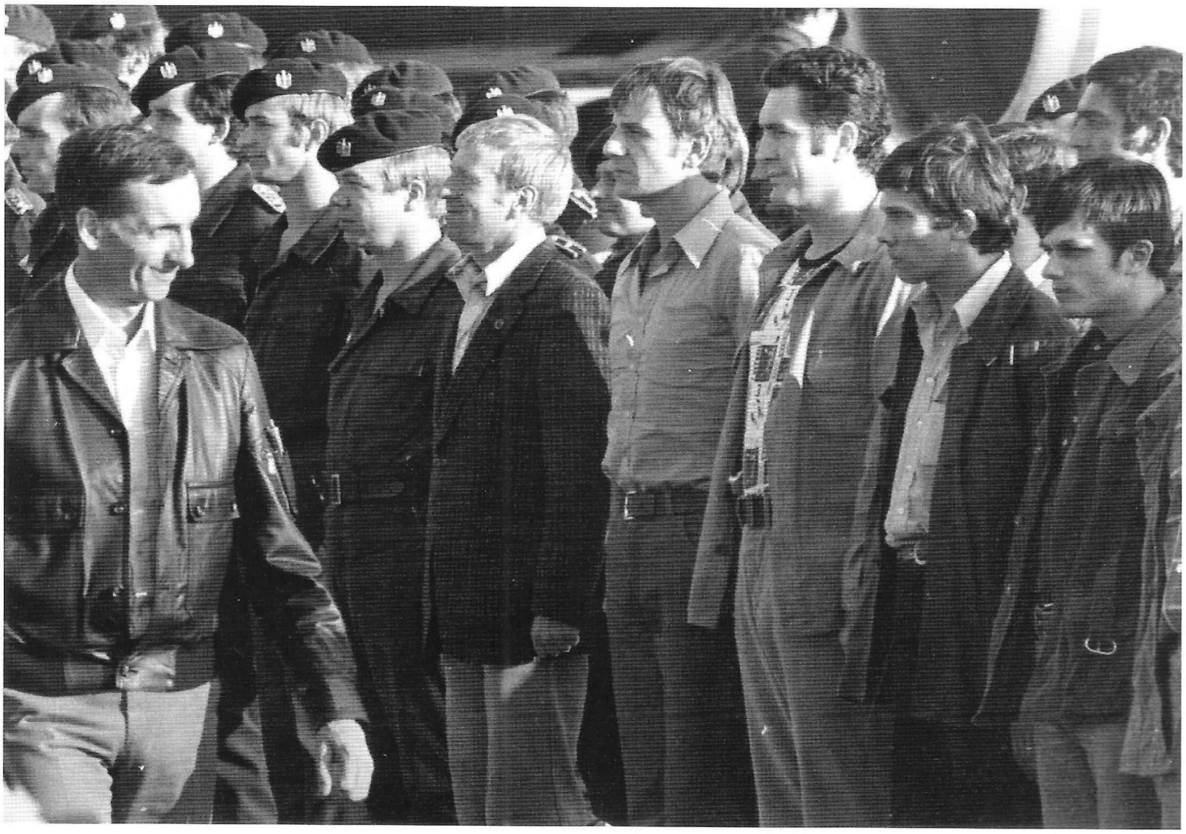
With the arrival of his main force, Wegener had at his disposal about 60 highly trained officers, plus two SAS soldiers and a large body of Somali troops and police. Wegener also now had the support of his capable deputy, Major Klaus Blatte. What was critical was that Wegener now began to create the framework around which he could launch a hostage-rescue mission. As an initial precaution, he formed an immediate response team who could storm the aircraft at a moment's notice in case events took a turn for the worse prior to a planned operation being initiated. Recon officers (snipers) also positioned themselves at various concealed positions round the aircraft. As well as providing a killing capability, the snipers had a critical function of observing the aircraft around the clock. Using radio communications, they reported back to Wegener everything they saw, particularly the movement of passengers and hijackers around the interior of the aircraft. This visual intelligence could be added to information gleaned by the negotiators, helping to build a picture of exactly what was occurring inside the plane.

Around the main airport buildings, however, Wegener established his principal headquarters and a radio communications centre. The latter would act as the focal point for communications with a tactical communications post that would be established nearer the aircraft once the mission was under way. Preparing for the possibility of high casualties, particularly amongst the hostages, Wegener also set up a first-aid post in the control tower. Apart from the immediate action group, Wegener now took 28 GSG 9 officers and two SAS men and formed the assault group.

The GSG 9 officers had brought with them a basic but formidable spectrum of firepower. The snipers were equipped with Mauser SP66 sniper rifles. These bolt-action 7.62 x 51mm NATO rifles were extremely accurate out to ranges of 600m (1,968ft) and beyond, and had excellent penetration through structures such as thin sheet metal and glass. The SP66 was also fitted with a three-shot magazine – the GSG 9 officers had learnt the lessons of the Munich massacre, when the firepower response of German police marksmen had been hampered by their single-shot rifles, exacerbating the loss of life. The standard optical sight on the SP66 was a Zeiss 1.5–6x magnification zoom telescope, but the snipers at Mogadishu also had night-vision image-intensifying scopes. These were invaluable, as they enabled the snipers to maintain their reconnaissance duties throughout the night.

For those who would conduct the close-range assault, there were three principal weapons selected. The first was a firearm destined to become virtually the signature weapon of counter-terrorist forces in the 1970s and 80s – the Heckler & Koch MP5 sub-machine gun. Developed during the 1960s, the MP5 was based on the roller-locked delayed-blowback system used in H&K's extremely successful G3 rifle. The weapon fired a standard 9 x 19mm Parabellum pistol cartridge, fed from either a 15- or 30-round box magazine, at a cyclical rate of 800rpm. One of the traditional problems of sub-machine guns for close-in security work was their inaccuracy when delivering a juddering burst of full-auto fire, endangering bystanders as much as terrorists. A critical advantage of the MP5 was that it fired from a closed bolt. Many machine guns fire from an open bolt, meaning that when the trigger is first pulled the entire mass of the bolt shifts forward to strip a round from the magazine, then chamber and fire it. The shift of mass affects stability and accuracy. The bolt of the MP5, by contrast, was closed up to the chamber when the gun was cocked, meaning that only the firing pin moved when the trigger was pulled. The result was, and remains, a highly accurate weapon capable of delivering devastating fire in close-quarter engagements.

Yet the fact was that the GSG 9 officers were faced with a hostage-rescue mission in a cramped aircraft and with civilians literally on all sides. For this reason, a large number of the officers would go aboard LH181 simply armed with handguns. Two pistols in particular were used. The first was another weapon from the H&K stable, the P7. This was available in either 9mm or .45 ACP calibres, and gave accurate and reliable results in well-trained hands. Barry Davies, however, noted that in terms of both ammunition capacity and power he would have preferred to use the Browning 9mm High Power, the standard handgun of the SAS for many years. While the High Power offered a magazine capacity of 13 rounds, the P7 could take only eight rounds. Arguably even more unsatisfactory were the .38 revolvers carried by some



The men of the GSG 9 raid at Mogadishu, here inspected by their commander, Ulrich Wegener. At the time, GSG 9 recruits underwent five months of basic training then three months of special training, the latter focusing on everything from aircraft assaults to high-speed driving. (Press Association) of the officers, which fired a rather low-powered cartridge and had a capacity of only six rounds. Nevertheless, one of the advantages of a revolver is that unlike an automatic pistol they almost never jam; if a cartridge misfires, another pull on the trigger simply turns the cylinder to the next cartridge.

In terms of other personal equipment, the GSG 9 soldiers were travelling extremely lightly. Rather than a formal uniform, the officers were generally wearing jeans and simple shirts. The one concession to military garb were the bulky bullet-proof vests worn over the shirt. Wearing largely civilian-style clothing had a political as well as a practical implication. There were natural sensitivities about a German paramilitary force wearing full uniform in a foreign country, so a more informal style of dress was more acceptable to the Somali hosts. The GSG 9 officers would not even wear head protection during the assault, it being felt that the helmets would obscure vision in the confines of the aircraft and might reflect light during the approach to the aircraft. Despite being relatively lightly equipped, it still took the GSG 9 officers more than two hours to unload everything at Mogadishu and get ready for action.

Action plan

The plan for the assault on LH181 was largely developed by Wegener and his team back in Dubai, although with the limited human resources available at that time. Essentially, the plan had one simple priority – get the hostage-rescue officers inside the aircraft as quickly as possible, and with the element

A still from the two-part German film *Dead Pool* faithfully represents the conditions in the cockpit of LH181 during the hijack. Here Mahmud (played by Cuco Wallraf) is threatening Captain Schumann (Mathias Freihof) with his Tokarev handgun. (Press Association)

of surprise. On the Boeing 737, there were six possible entrances. At the front and rear of the aircraft, on the port side, were the aircraft's main passenger doors, with corresponding smaller service doors on the opposite side. These principal entrances and exits were heavy and included security features, and were not easily opened from the outside. The force required to open these doors in an emergency was 32kg (70lb) – this effort was one reason why Somali soldiers were not selected for the operation, as they were simply too weak to handle such doors. Yet there were also two emergency exits on the aircraft, one over each wing. These presented a much more accessible option for the raiders. Not only did the wings provide a convenient platform for the officers just beneath the doors, but the exits also required far less force to open – about 18kg (39lb).

In Dubai, Wegener's plan ran roughly as follows. (Remember that this plan was more of an immediate action operation, as the full resources of the GSG 9 team were not available, nor were the positions of the terrorists aboard the aircraft fully known.) First, the assault team would make a silent approach from the rear of the aircraft, taking advantage of this blind spot to close up to the aircraft. The team would be carrying special assault ladders, essentially short ladders with their tops wrapped in cloth so they could be positioned silently against the aircraft's fuselage and wings. Once the assault team had covered the distance to the aircraft, they would break into four teams of two men. At the vanguard of the attack would be pairs of GSG 9/SAS men outside each overwing emergency exit. Two other teams would position themselves in readiness below the front and rear main passenger doors.

For the actual attack, the Dubai plan was to be led by the teams positioned next to the emergency exits. They would enter the aircraft fast, opening the doors quickly by using the emergency exit panels on the outside of the aircraft (the doors would fall into the aircraft interior). Stun grenades would then be thrown inside the aircraft, their detonation confusing both terrorists and passengers alike and providing a window for the GSG 9 officers to enter and gain their bearings. Barry Davies notes further plans to help 'enhance the effect of the stun grenades':

> I had instructed one of the European seconded officers how to switch the APU on and off. He was to trip the switch the moment we stood to open the hatches, which would kill the lights, then three seconds after he heard the stun grenades going off he was to switch them on again. I hoped that by this time I would be in the aisle and closing rapidly with any terrorists at the front of the aircraft.[21]

The pair entering from the port side would then fight their way up to the front of the aircraft, killing or otherwise neutralizing any terrorists in the forward economy section, first-class cabin and cockpit. Conversely, the starboard pair would clear to the rear of the aircraft. They would not be on their own. The intention was for back-up teams on the ground beneath the

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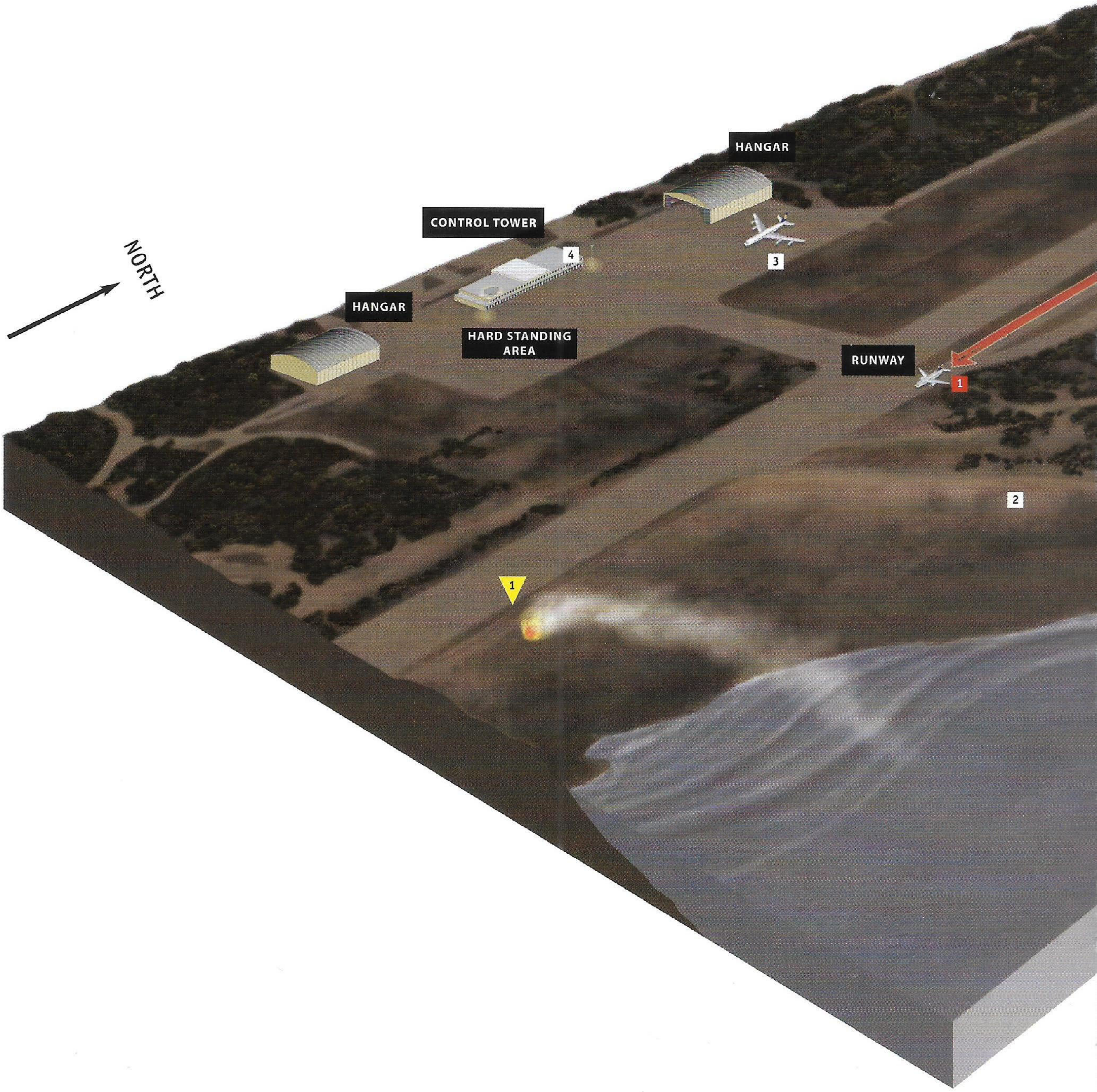
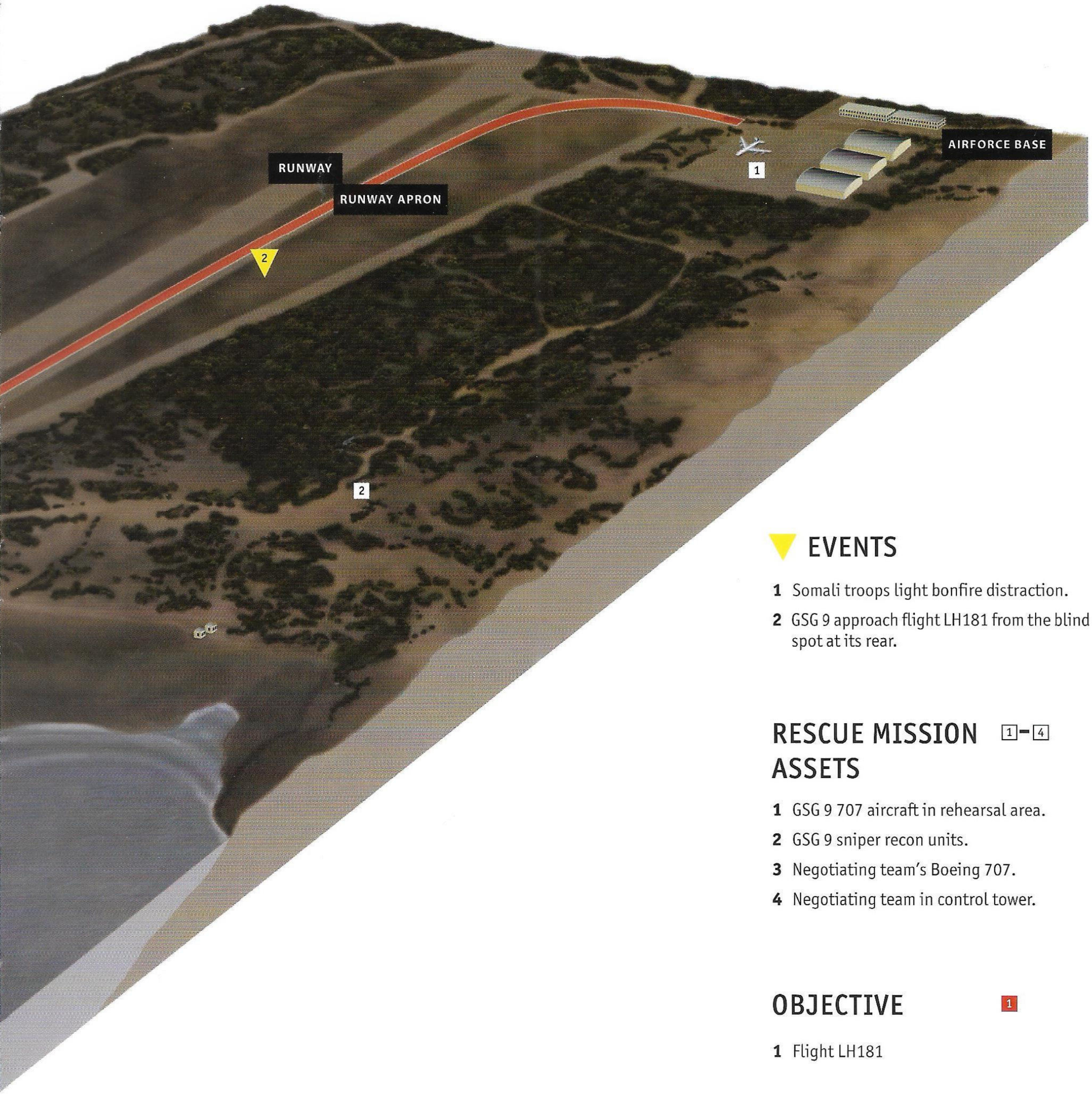
[21] Davies, *Assault on LH181*, p.114

OPERATION *FEUERZAUBER*

17 OCTOBER, 1977

Mogadishu Airport immediately before the GSG 9 raid. LH181 sits on the apron parallel to the runway, facing to the south. A fire, started by the local Somali forces, blazes some 300m (984ft) in front of the aircraft as a distraction to the terrorists, drawing more of the terrorists forward into the front section of the aircraft. The terrorist leader, Mahmud, keeps under radio contact with the negotiation team in the control tower; they had flow in on a Boeing 707 that day. The GSG 9 team itself deployed from an area of buildings at the north end of the runway, approaching LH181 silently from its blind spot directly to the rear. GSG 9 sniper recon units (E) are positioned in the rough ground to the east of the runway, providing information to Wegener via radio as he prepares to launch the attack.




RUNWAY
RUNWAY APRON
AIRFORCE BASE
1
2
2

▼ EVENTS

1 Somali troops light bonfire distraction.

2 GSG 9 approach flight LH181 from the blind spot at its rear.

RESCUE MISSION ASSETS 1–4

1 GSG 9 707 aircraft in rehearsal area.

2 GSG 9 sniper recon units.

3 Negotiating team's Boeing 707.

4 Negotiating team in control tower.

OBJECTIVE 1

1 Flight LH181

A general photograph of the interior of a Boeing 737-200, looking forward towards the first-class cabin. The cramped dimensions of the aircraft interior was one reason why the SAS stun grenades were not used internally. It was feared that the grenade's phosphorus content might start a fire, which would cause panic amongst the passengers. (Micha Sender)

wings to climb up after them when entrance was achieved, and act in a supporting role during the operation. Their priority was to maintain control of the passengers, overseeing the evacuation and also consolidating any gains in the centre of the aircraft. At the same time, the teams positioned next to the front and rear passenger doors would also gain access, hopefully quickly enough to provide supporting fire to the team members already inside.

Concerning the viability of the plan, Davies had the following to say:

> Although this basic plan was quite uncomplicated, timing would be everything. I felt that a great deal of practice would be needed to get the timing correct, particularly the timing for the lead assault teams to effect their entry and take control of the front and rear aisle various. I was conscious that, once we were in control of the aisle where all the passengers were seated, the only people in serious danger would be those on the flight deck.[22]

So ran the plan to rescue the hostages at Dubai. But by 17 October the situation had changed significantly. For a start, Wegener now had many more people on his team, and a lot more firepower. This had an important impact on the Mogadishu action. Whereas in Dubai, Wegener's plan focused on a limited number of aircraft doors, now he could assault all doors of the aircraft simultaneously. This multiple-assault strategy gave greater potential for overwhelming any terrorist defensive response.

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[22] Davies, *Assault on LH181*, p.114

Wegener now modified his overall plan. Note that in some accounts of the Mogadishu operation, the SAS are placed as more central to the planning phase of the operation than is warranted. Certainly the expertise of Davies and Morrison was valuable in the consultation phases of the operation, but in terms of practical execution the plan was largely the development of Wegener and his GSG 9 team. This team had, after all, been training in aircraft assaults since their formation back in 1972. The two SAS men would indeed be involved with the assault, but in a far different capacity than that envisaged at Dubai. The critical change in their role was in the use of the stun grenades. It was decided that detonating the pyrotechnic devices inside the aircraft ran a significant risk of setting fire to seating (a more realistic prospect now that the terrorists had soaked the aisle and seats with alcohol) or of detonating explosive charges. Instead, Davies and Morrison were to hurl the stun grenades in front of the cockpit and front section windows, temporarily stunning any terrorists who happened to be in the vicinity.

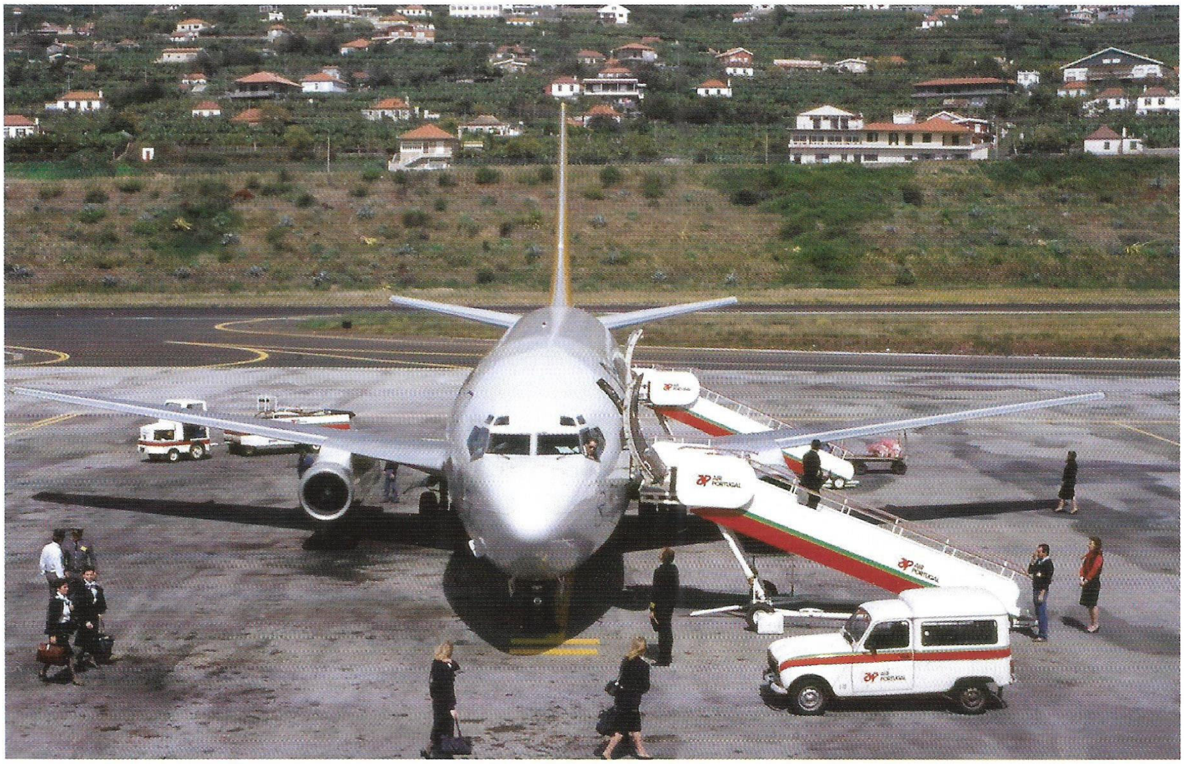
Of ultimate importance in this whole plan was that the hijackers had to have no inkling of what was about to hit them until the doors of the aircraft were forced open. Two primary distraction mechanisms were put in place to ensure this outcome. First, the control-tower negotiators would maintain a constant stream of verbal traffic with Mahmud in the cockpit, occupying his mind and keeping at least one of the terrorists in a known position at the front of the aircraft. The second part of the distraction tactics would utilize the local Somali military. Wegener requested that at an agreed time, Somali soldiers would start a large bonfire at the southern end of the runway. Blazing away approximately 300m (984ft) in front of the *Landshut*, the bonfire was intended to draw the attention of the terrorists out through the cockpit windows, meaning that they would be initially distracted from the GSG 9 attack from the rear.

Once they were underneath the 737, the GSG 9 officers would then launch the mission largely along the lines of the plan in Dubai, albeit with all doors stormed at once. Wegener divided the attacking force into two major groups. One group was to focus its attention on the doors on either side of the cockpit and on the port side wing emergency door. Once it had entered the aircraft, its responsibility was then to clear terrorists from the cockpit area, first-class compartment and front economy section. The other group was assigned to all the remaining doors, with responsibility for clearing the back half of the aircraft. They would have the additional responsibility of helping to remove the hostages at the earliest possible opportunity. The plan to liberate the hostages of flight LH181 was now in place. All that remained was its execution.

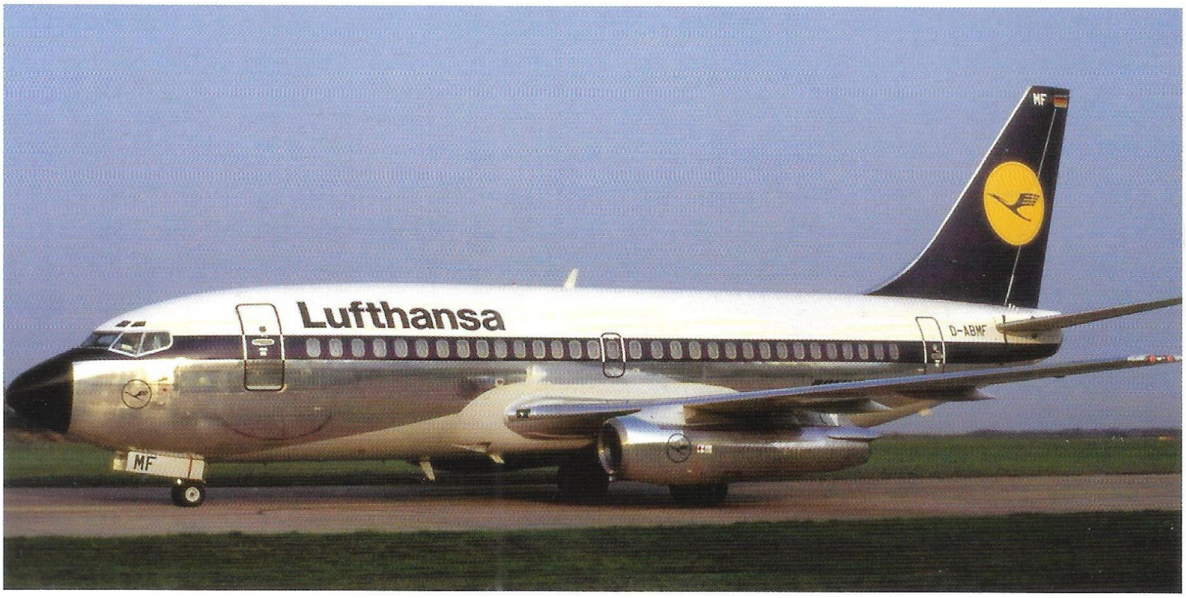
THE RAID

Aboard flight LH181, there was constant tension. Yet no one aboard seemed to have any suspicion of what was about to happen. The negotiations between Mahmud and the control tower continued, the German team creating the illusion of finalizing the arrangements for the arrival of the released prisoners.

Outside the aircraft, however, Wegener was putting in place his final details. At about 2245hrs on 17 October, he instructed his men that the assault operation would soon begin for real. It would be launched by the



A front view of an Air Portugal Boeing 737-200, showing the usual passenger access through port-side front and rear doors. The scale provided by the people walking around shows what a cramped operational space the aircraft was for GSG 9. (Udo Haafke)



codeword *Feuerzauber* (Fire Magic). Yet before the business of entering the aircraft could begin, there was the perilous runway crossing to undertake. In Wegener's mind, it was critical that he deploy his officers beneath the hijacked aircraft in good time. That way, he would be able to conduct as much last-minute reconnaissance of the aircraft as possible, in association with the eyes of the snipers that were still firmly fixed on the aircraft through their night-vision scopes.

A profile view of a Lufthansa Boeing 737-200. Note the size of the emergency exit over the port wing. Its high positioning on the fuselage meant that GSG 9 men could crouch beneath these exits without being seen from the windows. (Udo Haafke)

At around 0100hrs on the 18th, the GSG 9 forces formed themselves up into a narrow column and began to advance from the north end of the runway towards the aircraft. The journey was going to be a long one, involving crossing hundreds of metres of runway tarmac slowly, patiently and with total noise discipline. As Wegener described:

> Then we began closing on the plane, assault teams, reserve and back-up. I made my way over there behind the first team, approaching the plane, there was some moonlight that night. It wasn't pitch dark, but quite dark. We could only move slowly. It was terribly hot, even at night, and terribly humid too, our clothes were sticking to us, and we had to keep something on because we were lugging all kinds of equipment with us.[23]

18 OCTOBER 1977

0130hrs GSG 9 teams take position around flight LH181

To keep their visual profile down to a bare minimum, every member of the team had blacked-out faces and hands. The no-helmets policy also meant that there was no possibility of light glinting off helmets. This being said, to avoid arousing any suspicion, the authorities in the airport buildings had left all the terminal lights on – powerful illumination that lit up the whole airport. The GSG 9 movement was relying purely on the angle of approach to conceal their presence, keeping directly in line with the blind spot behind

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23 Aust, *Baader-Meinhof,* p.406

the tail. The airfield lights, however, began to throw ever-lengthening shadows off their bodies. These shadows stretched out to the sides of the aircraft, where they could have been spotted by vigilant eyes. To attempt to minimize the shadows, the officers crouched down as low as they could while maintaining a slow, methodical walk.

The movement to LH181 took a full half-hour. Thankfully, no one spotted the approaching shadows, and the officers positioned themselves beneath their respective assault points. They also began to erect the assault ladders against the fuselage and wings of the aircraft. An interesting innovation to some of the assault ladders was that two had been joined together side by side, which meant that two GSG 9 members could be positioned either side of each door and both could enter quickly. At the last minute, however, a problem emerged with the ladder system. The officers had been practising their assault techniques on a rehearsal Boeing 707. The rear of the 707 turned out to be lower than the rear of a 737, and the ladder would not reach effectively to the flatter part of the fuselage. Combined with the rather rough ground of the runway apron, the effect was that the top of the ladder stuck out at an angle away from the fuselage, and kept slipping off. Wegener had to find a rapid solution. It proved to be quite rudimentary – two men from the first-aid team at the rear of the aircraft were dispatched to hold the ladder in place with physical strength, a demanding task.

Once the operatives were in place at around 0130hrs, they now had to wait. The period of waiting was used to provide intelligence updates to

The key players of the Mogadishu raid (standing, left to right): commander of GSG 9 Ulrich Wegener, Lufthansa co-pilot Jürgen Vietor, German Minister of State Hans-Jürgen Wischnewski, the Federal Minister of the Interior Werner Maihofer and West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt. They stand around the injured Lufthansa stewardess Gaby Dillmann. (Press Association)

Wegener via secure and quiet communications. Just before 0200hrs, Wegener received a message from his reconnaissance team saying that there now appeared to be two hijackers in the vicinity of the cockpit, one male and one female. Mahmud himself was sat in the pilot's seat. One other terrorist was believed to be walking up and down the aisle. It was promising information. The ideal was for as many terrorists as possible to be in one place when the attack went in, making them more easy to identify, contain and kill. Yet the information about terrorist positions beyond the cockpit was still uncertain, and at some point Wegener would have to accept that uncertainty and go in.

Another small piece of reconnaissance added to the picture involved the cabin air pressure. The GSG 9 team was able to check the cabin pressure from outside the aircraft. If it was raised, it meant that opening the doors would be an easier feat, as the pressure would provide some assistance with moving the weight. Unfortunately, the pressure was normal, so the GSG 9 team would have to rely purely on brute strength. As the clock ticked on, with the GSG 9 officers in position, one can only wonder at the tension they experienced, and which was soon to find a release.

Hind Alameh, one of the hijackers of flight LH181 and the fiancé of Mahmud, was killed by GSG 9 fire during the hostage-rescue mission, while her female comrade, Suhaila Sayeh, survived with serious injuries. (Press Association)

Feuerzauber

At around 0200hrs, the last stages of the false negotiations were under way between Mahmud and the control-tower team. The German negotiators were playing their parts with Oscar-winning conviction, talking about issues such as the handling of the released prisoners, the transfer of the money and the procedure for the freeing of the hostages. Then, in front of the aircraft, a ball of fire rose into the air as the Somali troops ignited the distraction bonfire. It certainly seemed to do its job. Davies later recounted: 'There was the biggest, almightiest explosion you have ever seen in your life. About 300 metres in front of the aircraft the Somalis had set fire to like a bowser full of petrol. It was like daylight for about ten seconds.'[24]

It was time to go. With everybody in position, and with the recon teams informing Wegener that Mahmud was still in the cockpit, at 0207hrs on 18 October Wegener gave the codeword *Feuerzauber*, and the assault teams flew into operation.

Several actions now occurred simultaneously. On the port side of the aircraft, just behind the wing, Barry Davies threw two stun grenades: 'I threw a stun grenade over the [starboard] wing, and that went off with a hell of a bang. Then I threw my second one over the cockpit.'[25] On the other side of the aircraft, Morrison repeated this action, the combined stun grenade offensive shocking both passengers and hijackers alike. Davies also noted that the initial stun grenade came as a great shock to the two GSG 9 officers

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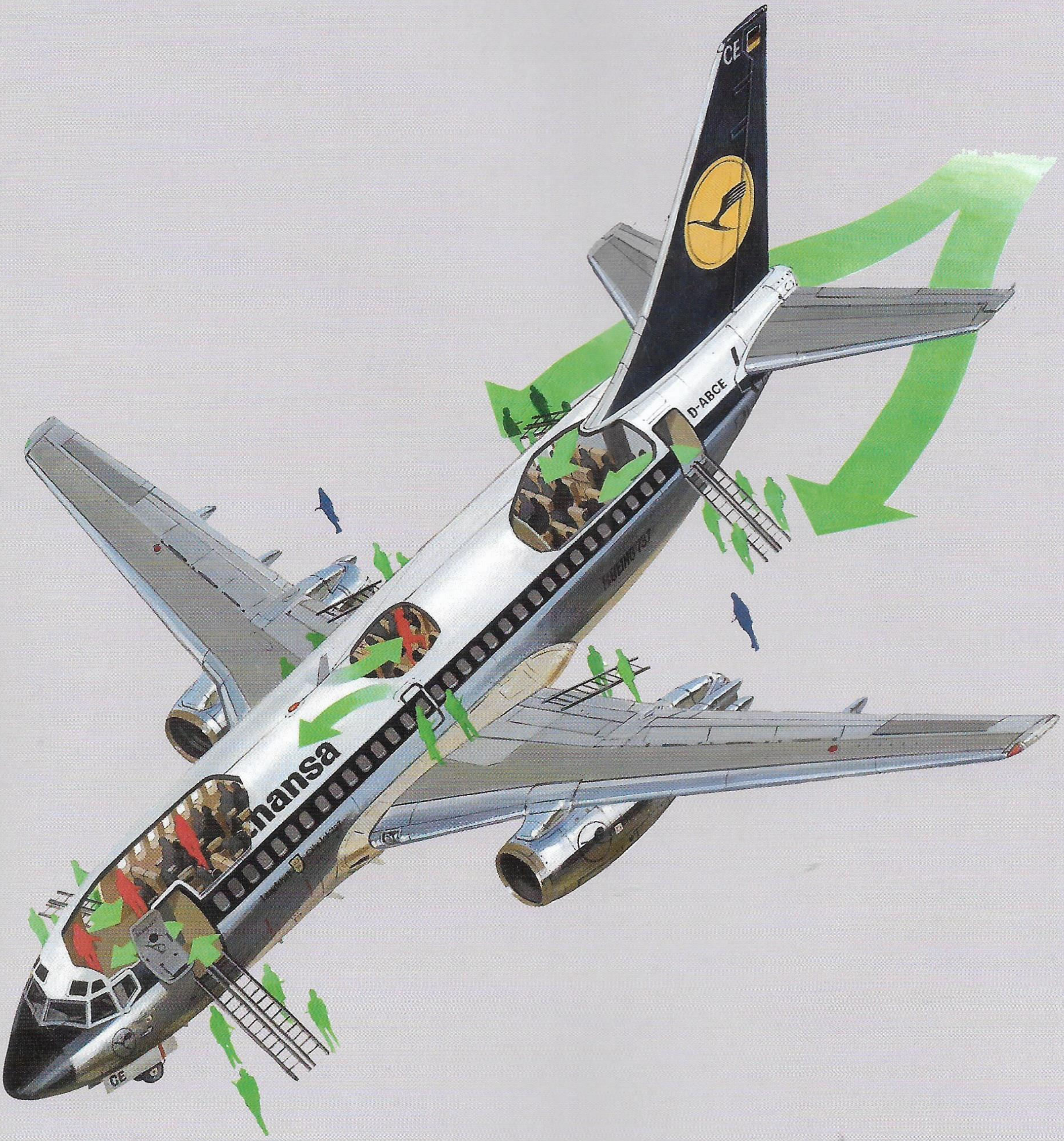
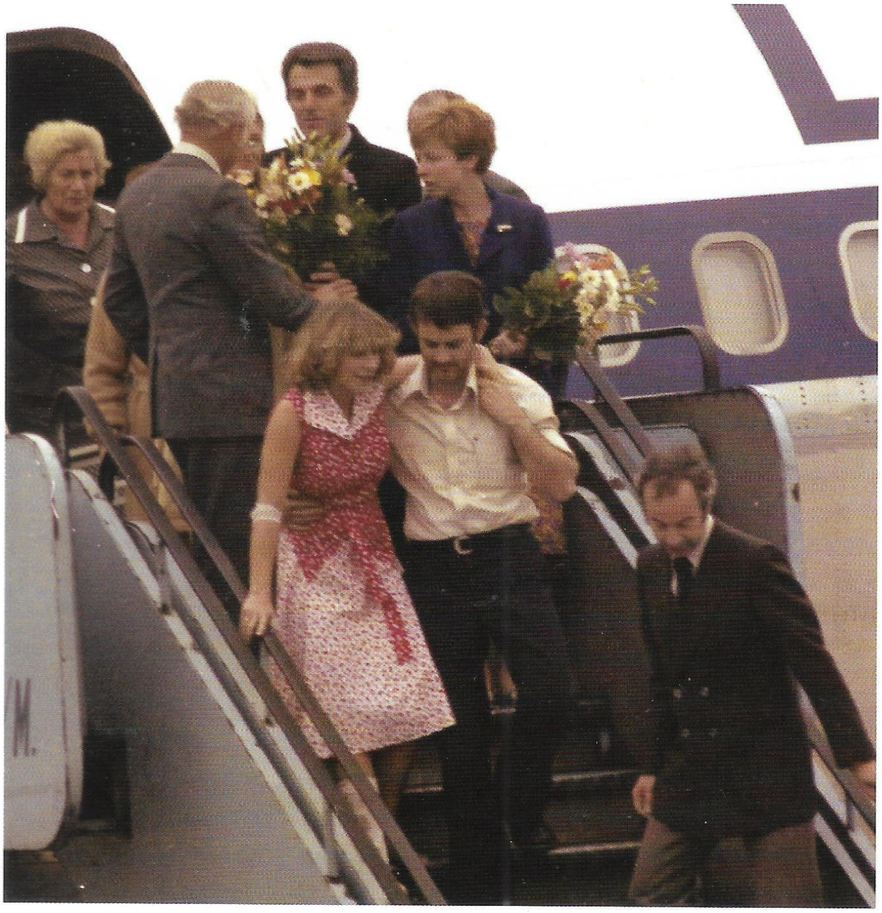
[24] Discovery Channel, *Special Forces Heroes*

[25] Ibid.



A view of the tactical situation just prior to the launch of Operation *Fire Magic*. Assault ladders have been positioned beneath the front and rear doors, and against the wings to allow GSG 9 officers to position themselves just beneath the wing emergency exits. Inside the aircraft, most of the aircraft terrorists are positioned towards the front of the aircraft, that being the centre of negotiations. Another female terrorist is farther back in the cabin, keeping watch over the bulk of the hostages in the economy section. When the assault is launched, the two SAS men throw stun grenades over the wings towards the front of the cabin, then the doors are opened and the GSG 9 officers surge in on the attack. Those going through the front doors and the port emergency exit attack towards the front of the aircraft. Those entering through the other doors head in the opposite direction. Clearing the aircraft takes only a few minutes, during which time three of the hijackers are killed and one seriously wounded.



Stewardess Gaby Dillmann is given assistance at Frankfurt am Main Airport following her rescue in Mogadishu. She received non-serious injuries from fragmentation grenades, dropped by one of the terrorists as he was shot aboard LH181. (Press Association)

18 OCTOBER 1977

0207hrs The assault begins

Wounded hijacker Suhaila Sayeh gives the victory sign and shouts her defiance as she is carried away from flight LH181 on a stretcher. She currently lives in Norway, having been released from prison in Germany in 1999. (Press Association) on the starboard side, the detonation magnified by the silence with which the operation had been conducted so far.

At the very second the stun grenades detonated, the attack teams went into action, using the emergency entry procedures to open the doors around the aircraft in double-quick time. The two men positioned in front of each door worked fast as a team, one man opening the door with the other then entering swiftly, his gun at the ready. To open the doors as fast as possible, some GSG 9 men hung from the handle and pushed themselves off from the fuselage, adding body weight to their muscular strength.

What followed was a matter of both chaos and precision. The manoeuvre inside the aircraft essentially broke down into two elements. The men surging through the front doors and the port emergency door were focused on clearing the front of the aircraft, right through to the cockpit. This action involved tracking down and neutralizing the hijackers' leader, Mahmud, to destroy the effective centre of terrorist control. The other teams focused their attentions on the rear of the aircraft, and on ushering the passengers out as quickly as possible. As the doors opened, there was a decisive shout of 'Go! Go! Go!', and officers on the ground raced up the ladders after their colleagues. It was critical to get as many officers inside as quickly as possible, to create a decisive firepower advantage and to take control of the hostages.

The front assault team, as soon as it entered the interior of the aircraft, encountered one of the female terrorists, Suhaila Sayeh. By this time, Mahmud was also firing from the cockpit area. One of the GSG 9 men was hit, the bullet piercing his neck, but thankfully without any life-threatening consequences. The next moment, however, Sayeh was struck full on by a burst of fire, falling to the ground severely wounded. The first hijacker had been taken out.

Having neutralized one terrorist, the GSG 9 men kept the movement going forward, checking every seat as they passed it. Vietor remembers the officers shouting, 'Heads down! Heads down! Where are the pigs?' For the hostages, this was a moment of danger nearly as much for them as the terrorists. The GSG 9 men were making split-second decisions about who to shoot and who to save, and anybody who remained standing risked being cut down by fire, intentionally or accidentally.

Then Wabil Harb appeared, moving from out of the first-class compartment clutching two hand grenades. A GSG 9 man reacted instinctively and swiftly – raising his gun he shot Harb through the head, killing him. The two hand grenades, however, now rolled from Harb's grasp. Both pins were pulled, and they tumbled under some passenger seats and detonated. Gaby Dillmann watched one of the grenades roll towards her:

> When the hand grenade started rolling I thought: what am I supposed to do? You want to hold your breath if there's an explosion, you want to let it out – or was that right? Anyway, I breathed out, and something exploded, and then I looked, OK, my spine's in working order, I thought, then I move my foot, which had been hit: wow, my toes still seem to be all there, I said. But even if I'd lost my foot, the main thing was that I was alive.[26]

There were two muffled thumps, and debris flew around the front passenger area. Miraculously, only two of the passengers were wounded by the grenade splinters, and only slightly. (These grenades were poor-quality home-produced plastic varieties, with limited explosive force and fragmentation properties.)

The momentum of the attack continued, with the efforts focused on the front of the aircraft. Mahmud himself came into the sights of the assault team, cornering the leader as they swarmed through the doors on all sides. Mahmud fired off some rounds from his handgun, but then a GSG 9 officer opened up with his pistol, hitting Mahmud with a total of five .38 rounds. Mahmud was not yet out of action, however. Wegener noted that 'he could still manage to just jump back into the cockpit and grab a hand grenade. We got him there with a burst of submachine gun fire.'[27] Mahmud's plan to become a hero of the PFLP had ended brutally in a stream of MP5 fire. (Mahmud did not die immediately, but died shortly after from his wounds.)

Three terrorists were now down, and farther back in the aircraft the GSG 9 men were already beginning the process of evacuating the passengers from every available door. (This action began about four minutes after the initial entry into the aircraft.) Beate Keller, one of the passengers, remembers her moment of freedom: 'So I finally freed myself [her hands had been tied with her own stockings by the terrorists] and very quickly on all fours I went to the back, and then they were there to meet us. And then we went down the stairs [the assault ladders].' Birgit Röhll also had an emotional journey to the outside of the aircraft: 'I ran down the stairs, and the sky, the dark sky, the stars – I realized what freedom is.'[28]

Soon the passengers had been evacuated, but the mission was not over. The team on board the now empty aircraft realized that one of the hijackers, a female (Hind Alameh), was missing and still on board the aircraft. This knowledge affected the handling of the freed hostages outside. They were gathered together on the tarmac about 40m (130ft) from the aircraft, held under the watchful armed presence of other GSG 9 officers. There remained the possibility that the final hijacker was hidden in amongst them, and until she was found they would stay under close watch. Meanwhile, the assault team moved slowly through the aircraft, when all of a sudden the terrorist was detected, hiding in one of the front toilets. She opened the door a little and opened fire with her handgun. A GSG 9 man responded by putting a burst of fire straight through the toilet wall, the bullets having no problem cutting through the insubstantial wood. The hijacker slumped out, soon to die of her injuries.

Seven minutes after the GSG 9 officers entered LH181, the operation was over. Wegener issued the codeword 'Springtime' to the anxiously listening authorities in the control tower, the word indicating that all the terrorists were neutralized and that the mission was effectively over. Not all of the terrorists were dead, of course. Suhaila Sayeh was seriously injured, and she

OVERLEAF: The terrorist Mahmud is killed by a burst of fire from a GSG 9 officer with an MP5 sub-machine gun. 'Captain' Mahmud was in the cockpit at the moment the raid was launched, talking to members of the German negotiating team in the control tower. He was momentarily disabled by a stun grenade exploding just feet from the cockpit window, but then rushed towards the first-class cabin with his Tokarev pistol. In the galley area, he spots GSG 9 operators and opens fire, but is quickly struck by five bullets fired from a .38 revolver. He staggers backwards, seriously wounded, and makes it back into the cockpit where he grabs for a hand grenade. At that moment, a GSG 9 officer closes the distance, and finishes him off with a short full-auto burst from an MP5.

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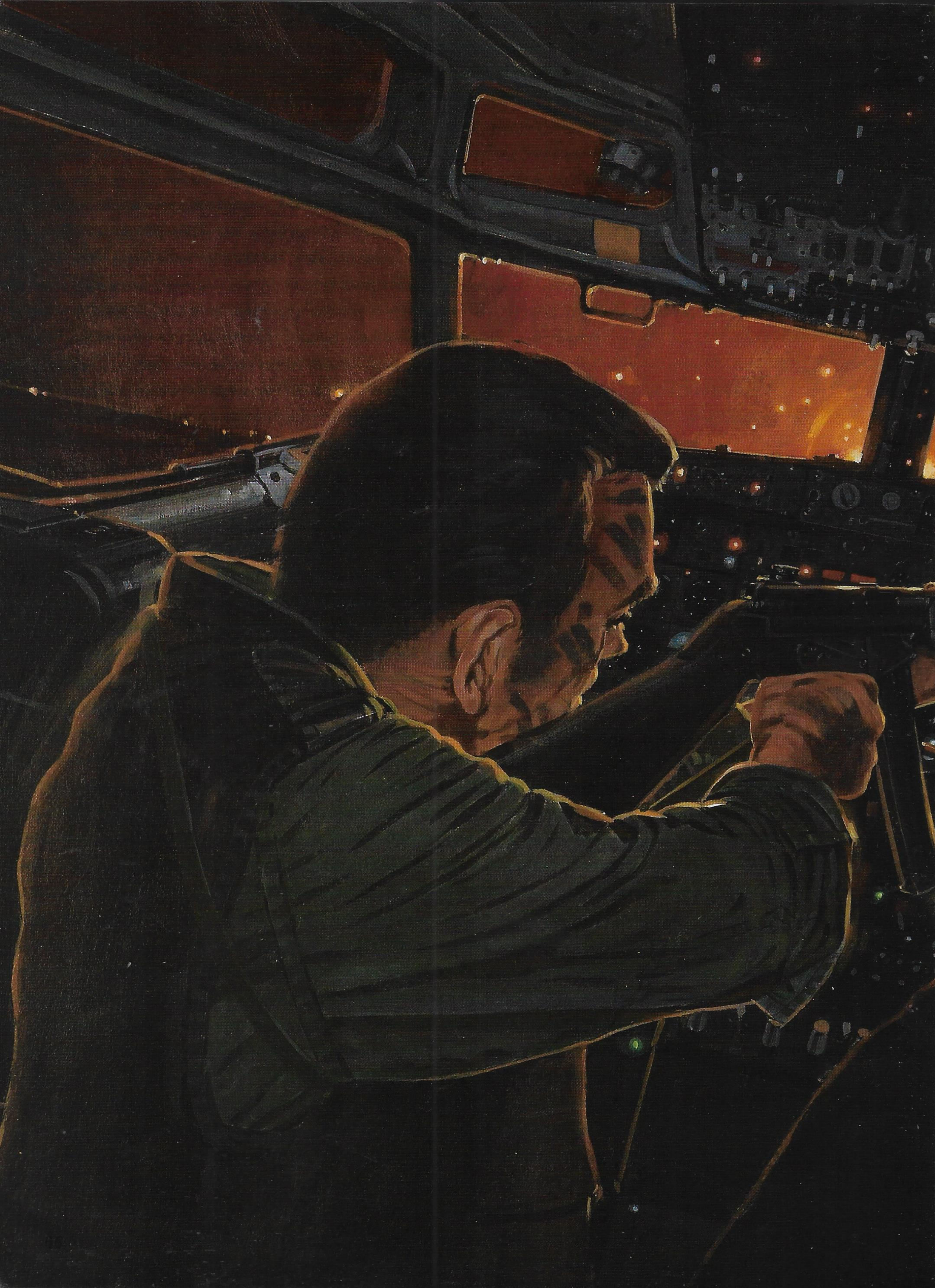
[26] Aust, *Baader-Meinhof*, pp.407–08

[27] Taillon, *Hijacking and Hostages*, p.134

[28] Quotations from Discovery Channel, *Special Forces Heroes*



CHE
GUEVARA

Lufthansa
Luftha
Köln
Intercontinental

The scene as the freed passengers of LH181 arrive back in Germany. In the bottom corner of the photo is an MP5-armed security agent; armed guards accompanied this flight home in case there were 'sleeper' terrorists still mixed with the passengers. (Press Association)

was dragged unceremoniously into an open part of the aircraft until she could be checked over to make sure she was clear of weapons. As she was lowered down from the aircraft and placed on a stretcher, she revived. Defiant to the end, she raised one hand and made a 'V' victory sign.

Once the plane was finally secured, the hostages were taken into the main airport terminal for medical assessment and treatment, and German and Somali police stepped in to take over the investigation.

Barry Davies stepped aboard the aircraft after the action, and noted the feeling inside:

> Climbing back on the wing, I re-entered the aircraft via the emergency hatch. Strangely, as if this Boeing 737 was a living thing, it seemed tired, like a hunted fox. Exhausted and hurt, it now sat quietly resting. The first thing that struck me was the stink – alcohol fumes mixed with urine-bleached air. In this unreal silence I saw Alastair coming up the aisle from the rear door. Together we went on to the flight deck, where we found Ulrich Wegener, still with a gun in his hand, and the Somali general. I was surprised to find a fairly heated conversation taking place between the two men. The subject appeared to be the bodies of the terrorists that lay at their feet.[29]

Back in the terminal, however, the passengers were getting used to the relief of freedom once again. That freedom had been given to them directly by the skill and expertise of the GSG 9 team, and at 0500hrs that team boarded an aircraft and began the journey back to Germany.

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29 Davies, *Assault on LH181*, p.145

ANALYSIS

The liberation of flight LH181 was a stunning coup for the German government. Not only did it demonstrate that Germany had now developed an effective, professional response to terrorism, it also illustrated a hardening of attitude to negotiating with terrorist factions. For both the RAF and the PFLP, the failure of the hijacking was a deadening blow to morale. It had its greatest impact upon the RAF. The prisoners in Stammheim jail heard the news about the hostage rescue on the radio. On the night of 17–18 October, Jan-Carl Raspe took a handgun, smuggled into the prison, from a hiding place in his cell and shot himself through the head. Nearby in another cell, Gudrun Ensslin tied a piece of loudspeaker cable to the grate over her cell window, and proceeded to hang herself. Irmgard Möller stabbed herself in the chest four times with a table knife, although she would survive these wounds. Also on that deadly night, Andreas Baader was found dead from gunshot wounds.

The deaths of these key RAF members largely decapitated the organization, although their terrorist presence would still be felt into the early 1990s. Yet immediate retribution would fall on the head of the unfortunate Hanns-Martin Schleyer. After a hideous trial of 43 days in captivity, Schleyer was taken out to an area of woodland on the French–Belgian border and shot three times in the head. A letter sent to the French newspaper *Libération* explained the RAF's actions (although it should be noted that the leadership of the RAF was by no means unanimous in executing Schleyer):

> After 43 days, we have ended Hanns-Martin Schleyer's miserable and corrupt existence.
>
> Herr Schmidt, who has been gambling with Schleyer's death from the beginning of his power play, can find his body in a green Audi 100 bearing Bad Homburg number plates parked in the Rue Charles Peguy in Mulhouse. His death is insignificant compared to the pain and anger we feel at the slaughter of Mogadishu and Stammheim. [Many in the RAF insisted that the deaths at Stammheim were murder, not suicide.] The fascist drama put on by the imperialists to crush the liberation movement doesn't surprise Andreas, Gudrun, Jan, Irmgard and ourselves.

> We will never forgive Schmidt and the imperialists who give him support for the shedding of such blood. The fight is just beginning. Freedom through armed anti-imperialist struggle.
>
> Siegfried Hausner Commando
> October 19, 1977[30]

Lufthansa
FLUGHAFEN
FRANKFURT/M.
Köln
Lu

Members of the West German government and officials from the Lufthansa airline welcome back the freed hostages of flight LH181, as they arrive at Frankfurt am Main Airport. The children on board, one of whom is visible here, were remembered for being especially self-controlled during the hijack. (Press Association)

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[30] RAF communiqué (19 October 1977)

Three of the key figures in the Red Army Faction (from left to right): Jan-Carl Raspe, Gudrun Ensslin and Andreas Baader. All three would go on to commit suicide in Stammheim prison on the night of 17–18 October 1977, following the failure of the LH181 hijack. (Press Association)

Schleyer's death was almost inevitable given the tough hand the German government had played. Yet on a tactical level, Germany had also proved the capabilities of GSG 9 in an operation that is still today used as a model for a competent hostage-rescue operation.

Tactical success

The success of the Mogadishu operation had much stacked against it. The terrorists were highly motivated and reasonably well armed. As the killing of the captain proved, they were also unafraid of using extreme violence. Their leader was a fundamentally unstable man, quick to anger and holding little but contempt for his hostages. Such a man was capable of taking the situation from status quo to massacre in a matter of minutes, which in turn meant GSG 9 officers had to be ready to move at a moment's notice.

The object of the GSG 9 rescue mission, flight LH181, was also constantly on the move, shifting at regular intervals between countries, not all of them with harmonious relationships with Germany. From a tactical point of view, this posed two major problems. First, the basic hostage-rescue plan had to be adapted to a new airport environment each time the aircraft moved. Second, the aircraft's peripatetic movements presented major challenges for Germany's diplomatic team. Each time the aircraft landed in a new country, they had to renegotiate the rights for GSG 9 personnel to operate on foreign soil, something not always granted. We can only speculate, for example, on whether conducting the mission in Dubai would have brought equal success, given the reduced manpower and the presence of hastily trained local soldiers in the assault team. Yet the efforts of Schmidt, Wischnewski and others were tireless in breaking down diplomatic boundaries, and finally turning the hostage-rescue mission into a mostly GSG 9 affair with the sanction of the Somali government. Doing so meant that there was much greater unity amongst the assault teams, having come from a common training background, sharing the same language and having an instinctive trust in each other.

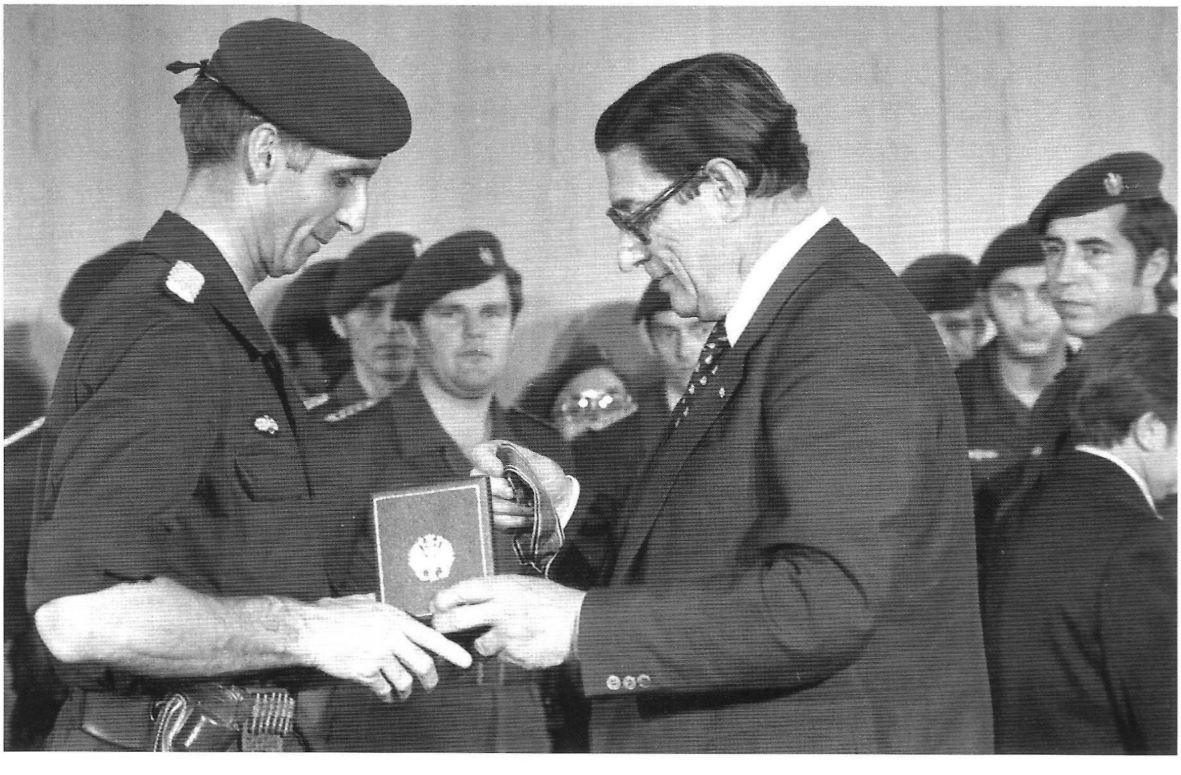
Pilots of the Lufthansa airline pay their last respects to Jürgen Schumann during the funeral ceremony held in Babenhausen, near Frankfurt am Main. Airline security was reviewed and tightened around the world following the LH181 hijack. (Press Association)

Remaining with the negotiating team, the Mogadishu operation also reveals how important psychological warfare is in such actions. Keeping Mahmud talking was critical not only to extending deadlines, but also in the final minutes for distracting his attention away from what was about to strike. Their efforts were backed by a clear political imperative from the German government, which established a policy based on no release of prisoners and, if necessary, the forcible release of the hostages from flight LH181. Such political clarity is absolutely critical when facing terrorist incidents. If it is not present, then the actions of both negotiators and special forces become hesitant and often confused, which in turn can result in poor operational execution. Furthermore, Wegener later noted that although Wischnewski was head of the crisis management team, he never interfered in tactical matters. Politicians who aspire to be armchair generals can be lethally dangerous in a hostage-rescue mission, but Wischnewski focused mainly on diplomacy and negotiation, and left mission planning directly in the hands of GSG 9.

Of course, the lion's share of praise for the success of the Mogadishu operation must go to the GSG 9 officers, and in particular their commander, Ulrich Wegener, and his deputy, Klaus Blatte. Building on his own experience, and incorporating advice from the accompanying SAS officers, Wegener constructed an assault plan that is virtually a textbook model for hostage rescue. First, the plan was essentially simple – approach silently from the rear, emplace ladders, enter the aircraft through the doors, kill/neutralize the hijackers, release the hostages. Such simplicity meant that the plan could be transported from airport to airport with minimal variation. It also meant that every participant had a very clear idea of his objectives, something that had been woefully lacking in Munich in 1972.

The clarity of the GSG 9 mission was juxtaposed against the confusion imposed on the terrorists. By flooding through all the aircraft's doors virtually simultaneously, the GSG 9 officers overwhelmed the hijackers with multiple threats. The officers carried a sensible mix of weaponry – handguns for ultimate manoeuvrability around the aircraft, and MP5s to provide decisive firepower when needed. The terrorists, by contrast, had an incoherent bag of weaponry; still dangerous, but unable to compete with what was arrayed against them.

Two further important lessons come out of the Mogadishu operation. The first is the ultimate importance of training. Although Wegener had to improvise according to circumstances, he and his men had been training for aircraft assaults for several years by the time they reached Mogadishu. They had a deep understanding of the physical structure, basic engineering and internal layout of most contemporary airliners, especially those operated by the national carrier Lufthansa. (When LH181 was hijacked, senior members of the team also carried around with them blueprints for the Boeing 737, so they would know every angle and corner of the aircraft when they entered.) Such familiarity with aircraft, and the tactics involved with taking them, paid huge dividends at Mogadishu, as the procedures for the



Ulrich Wegener is presented with the Federal Cross of Merit by Hans-Jürgen Wischnewski at the Chancellery in Bonn on 20 October 1977. (Press Association)

27 October 1977.
The remains of one of the Red Army Faction prisoners who committed suicide in Stammheim prison are carried by police and cemetery officials in preparation for their funerals. A by-product of the Mogadishu operation was the deaths of three high-ranking RAF members. (Press Association)

assault were hard-wired into their minds and bodies. Missions conducted at places such as Entebbe also provided valuable lessons for informing GSG 9's training programme.

The second lesson is the value of co-operation. Although their involvement was rather rudimentary, the Somali police and military were nevertheless critical to the successful outcome of the mission. Their enthusiastic distraction fire, plus the presence of police and troops who could take over once the mission was complete, meant that the GSG 9 officers had the ability to focus on the specific job in hand and not be distracted by peripheral issues. The involvement of the SAS also showed a welcome spirit of international liaison. Accounts of the LH181 hijacking indicate that there was no bravado or posturing between the German and British operatives, just a simple willingness to come up with the best plan possible and deliver it in the most efficient manner. The British involvement helped add to the already growing reputation of the SAS, and watered the co-operative roots that snake through the European special forces community even today. As an expression of its appreciation, the Secretary of State for Defence, Fred Mulley, wrote the following letter to the head of the SAS, Brigadier John Watts:

> 20th October 1977
> Dear Brigadier
>
> I am writing on behalf of the Prime Minister and my other Cabinet colleagues to congratulate the Special Air Service on its part in effecting the release of hostages at

> Mogadishu Airport on Monday evening. The advice and assistance of Major Alastair Morrison and Sergeant Barry Davies made an invaluable contribution to the planning of a successful and significant operation. When the Prime Minister visited Bonn on Tuesday, Chancellor Schmidt made a point of expressing his Government's thanks for the assistance which we provided, and there is no doubt that it was very much appreciated.
>
> I should be most grateful if you would pass on the Cabinet's sincere congratulations and thanks to Major Morrison and Sergeant Davies.
>
> Yours sincerely,
> Fred Mulley

Later, Davies and Morrison were invited to dinner at the German Embassy along with Fred Mulley, where they were presented with silver cigarette boxes and signed photographs of Chancellor Schmidt.

The weaknesses in the Mogadishu operation were quickly identified by Wegener himself. Intelligence and communications, for example, were flawed from the outset. As J. Paul De B. Taillon has pointed out, radio sets were troubled by the high humidity of Somalia, which meant that hand signals became the main means of reliable communications. He also makes important points about intelligence:

> For Colonel Wegener, Mogadishu demonstrated that the means had to be found to provide better intelligence and to enhance the GSG 9 reconnaissance capability. Intelligence officers from West Germany's domestic and foreign intelligence agencies were subsequently seconded to GSG 9, as well as to act as liaison officers. For the nations not already experienced in this type of warfare, they were served notice to take such eventualities seriously, and prepare for them by establishing a counterterrorist option similar to GSG 9.[31]

Taillon illustrates how effective counter-terrorism operations must lock the spearhead of special forces on to the shaft of strong national intelligence agencies. Mogadishu was the culmination of multiple strands of effort: governmental, diplomatic, psychological and tactical. That the final result was such a resounding success is a fitting demonstration of the capabilities and focused aggression of the GSG 9 officers.

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[31] Taillon, *Hijacking and Hostages*, pp.135–36

CONCLUSION

Following the mission at Mogadishu, the men of GSG 9 flew back to Cologne-Bonn airport, where they were rightly fêted as heroes by the German public and government. When they went down the steps of the airliner, they were greeted by crowds of well-wishers and political figures, plus large numbers of TV cameras, photographers and reporters. As they were dressed very casually, some people commented on how much the men appeared like the 'boys next door', rather than the efficient fighters they had proved themselves to be.

Once they returned to base, the phone rang off the hook. The public interest in this unit was extremely high, much as the SAS would experience following the resolution of the Iranian Embassy siege in 1980. Wegener also read an Order of the Day from the Federal Minister of the Interior, Dr Werner Maihofer, expressing the gratitude of the state:

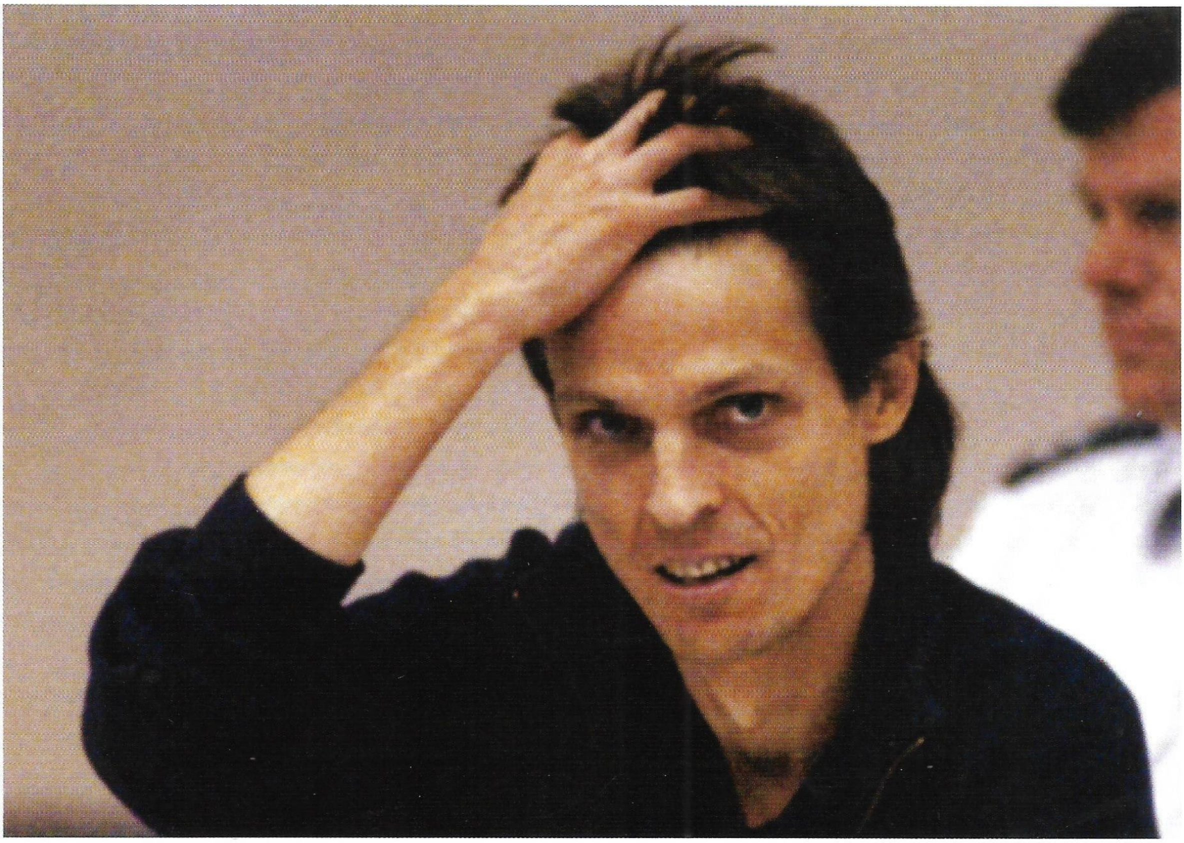
> Officers of GSG 9 have released 90 hostages from the hands of terrorists on the airfield of Mogadishu. They risked their lives to save those of the hostages. Through courageous action they have ended the disgraceful blackmail of our nation. The operation in Mogadishu has attracted worldwide recognition. It has set high standards for fighting international terrorism . . . I should like to express my gratitude and acknowledgement to the members of GSG 9.

The next day, the GSG 9 team was dressed in their full uniform to attend a special awards presentation at the Federal Chancellery, hosted by Chancellor Schmidt himself. The event was made more poignant by the attendance of many passengers and crew from flight LH181. Wegener and all the GSG 9 men involved in the operation were awarded the Bundesverdienstkreuz am Bande (Federal Cross of Merit).

Of course, the celebrations of victory at Mogadishu were darkened by the loss of Jürgen Schumann, who was posthumously awarded the Bundesverdienstkreuz am Bande 1st class. Buried in Babenhausen in Hesse, and survived by a wife and two sons, Schumann was subsequently remembered in the name of the Lufthansa Pilot School in Bremen and also in a street name in the town of Landshut.

And what of the sole-surviving terrorist, Suhaila Sayeh? She partially recovered from her injuries, although wounds to her legs left her with walking difficulties for the rest of her life. She was tried and convicted of her crimes in Somalia, and sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment. Yet in 1978, to international outcry, she was released on the grounds of ill health, and placed on a cargo plane flying out of the country to Baghdad. From there she went to live in Beirut, but in 1991 made a return to Europe, going to live in Oslo with her husband (the human rights activist Dr Ahmad Abu Matar) and her daughter. Eventually, however, the Norwegian authorities became aware of Sayeh's murky past. In 1995 she was arrested on charges of air piracy and murder (the same charges for which she was convicted in Somalia) and was extradited to Germany for trial. Convicted once again, she was sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment, but was released in 1999.

Monika Schumann, the widow of murdered Lufthansa pilot Jürgen Schumann, attends the funeral ceremony of her husband with Holger Börner, the State Minister of Hesse (eyes closed). Co-pilot Jürgen Vietor stands on the left. (Press Association)



Red Army Faction terrorist Christian Klar on trial in Stuttgart over his alleged involvement in a 1979 bank robbery. The RAF continued its activities until the 1990s, and the organization officially dissolved in 1998. (Press Association)

As we have seen, strong actions by counter-terrorist forces have not stopped the world being blighted by terrorist atrocities. Indeed, badly handled or excessive counter-terrorist responses can inspire fresh generations of insurgents, who become trapped in cycles of violence and counter-violence. Yet looking back to 1977, we see an operation that exemplifies both aggression and restraint, a proportionate response to a very real threat. It stands as a model not only of tactical excellence, but also of all the qualities to which the worldwide special forces community aspires.

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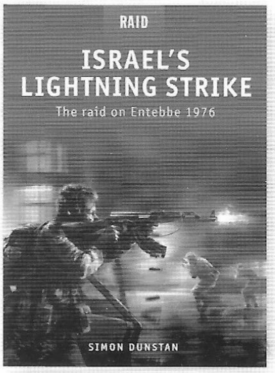
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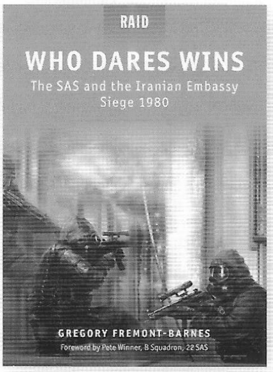
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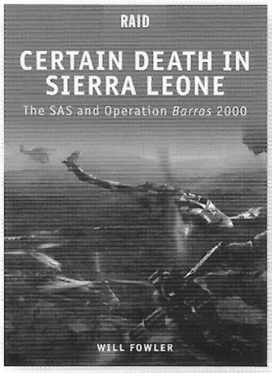
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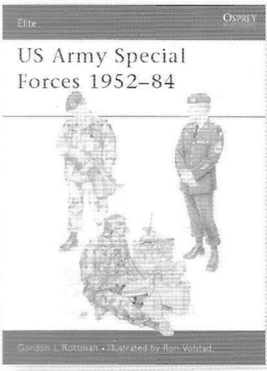
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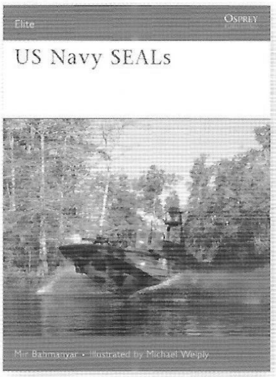
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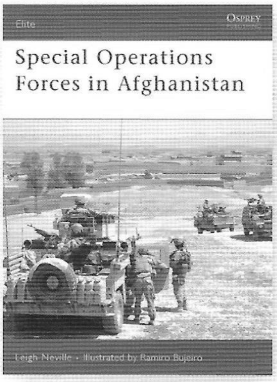
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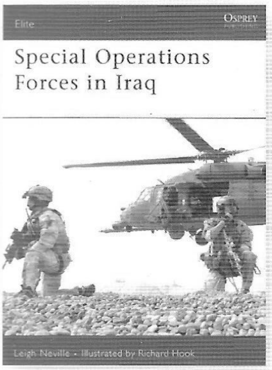
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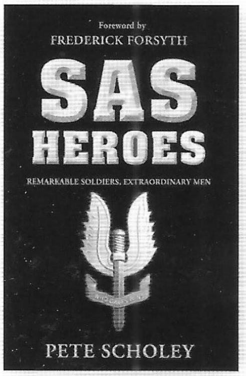
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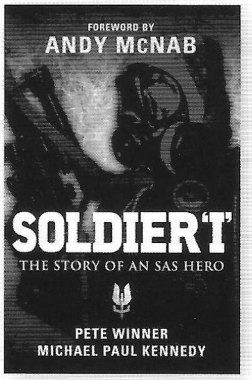
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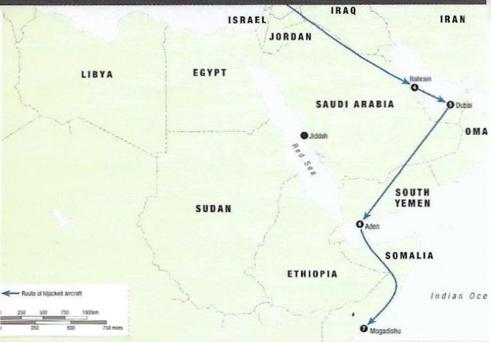
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